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OR,
THE OCEAN RIVALS.

A Companion Story to "Sibyl,
The Sea Siren."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

NUMBERED AMONG THE SLAIN.

Two vessels driving along over a rough sea, and before a brisk wind, with all the sail set that they dared spread to the breeze, and from the bows of the one flashes of flame bursting, and from the stem of the other the same, followed by the deep roar of heavy guns.

It was a sea chase by night, in half a gale, both vessels beautiful in build, and of schooner rig, and though the pursuer was the swifter of the two, and had proven the stronger and more deadly, for her hull was not marred by the fire of the pursued, here and there only a splintered spar, a rent in the sails, showing the little she had suffered.

Her flying adversary, however, was torn with

HE ALMOST SHRIEKED THE WORDS: "SAVED! SAVED! I YET LIVE FOR REVENGE! I
WILL YET SWEEP THE SEA SIREN FROM THE DEEP!"

shot, her sails were rent, her spars gashed, and her shot-seamed decks were strewn with the dead and dying of her crew.

Her battery numbered the same as the guns on the pursuer, her crew had been equal in number, when the chase began, but now she was almost a wreck, and her defenders had suffered heavily.

But she still sped on, still fled from her more flat-keeled enemy, until a broadside from her opponent brought her to, and added many more to the list of killed and wounded.

Upon the pursuer's deck the crew stood at their guns, the sailmen were at their posts, and a band of boarders crouched near the quarter-deck, ready to follow their captain's lead.

There was an air of perfect discipline upon all, and though the vessel's decks bore blood-stains, where some gallant tar had fallen, the dead or wounded had been quickly removed below.

The battery of the schooner was a superb one, consisting of one bow pivot-gun of superior mount and workmanship and forty-two-pound rifle, five long eighteens to a broadside, and two pivot stern guns of thirty-two caliber—eight splendid pieces for a craft of her tonnage, which was about two hundred tons.

The hull of the schooner was very long and sharp, though she was not of very low build, rising well out of the water, and particularly fore and aft, with high bulwarks that protected her decks well in rough weather.

Her extremely needle-like bowsprit, running well up, and her remarkably tall masts, the top-masts particularly so, would be remarked upon by any sailor at a glance, while the great breadth between the masts would also be noted.

This gave a very large foresail to the schooner, and with her long bowsprit and main-boom, the spread of sail she set was simply enormous.

Her crew, dressed in blue pants, white shirts and red skull-caps, were a picturesque looking, bronzed-faced lot of men, and they stood at their posts with the air of those who knew their strength and their commander.

The latter stood on the quarter-deck with two other officers, evidently his lieutenants, while a group of four middies were conversing together amidships.

The officers and men, from the captain down, were all young, it seemed, the commander of the handsome craft being hardly over twenty-six, with a face in which was strangely blended good looks, strength of character and courage.

He wore a blue uniform, jacket and pants, and they fitted his form to perfection, while his head was sheltered by a tarpaulin encircled by a gold band, and with an anchor in front framed by a wreath of gold.

His officers were likewise uniformed, but wore silver instead of gold-lace, and one of them particularly was a handsome, frank-faced fellow, who looked the man to do and dare anything.

The schooner flying from a relentless foe was about the same size as her pursuer, though she had not the spread of canvas nor the very trim appearance of the other.

Alone, she would be called a beautiful craft, but compared with the one gliding along in her wake the difference was marked.

Her crew were uniformed, and her officers were resplendent with gold-lace, one of them markedly noticeable; but there was neither the air of discipline nor the general neatness to be seen as upon her pursuer, while her men were certainly rough-looking, and in many cases evil-faced fellows.

Her officers were three in number, her commander, the one rigged out so resplendently, being a young man of hardly more than twenty-three, with a dark face, handsome withal, yet then working with intense feeling that gave it a repellent expression.

The other two officers looked like men more accustomed to the fore-castle than the quarter-deck.

The strangest part of this sea chase was that both vessels carried the same colors at their peak, the American flag floating above each deck.

And yet, a hot fire, and a disastrous one to the pursued, was kept up between them.

At last a sharp luff of the pursuer, a terrific broadside, and the pursued was brought to by the loss of her bowsprit and the havoc that was done her rigging, for her mainsail came down with a run.

Then a fire of musketry was poured upon the disabled craft, and the crew with loud oaths and cries forsook their guns.

On came the victor in triumph; the cry was heard for boarders to be ready, and, under another hot fire, the pursuer was laid skillfully alongside.

"All is lost! but I will not hang!" said the young captain of the fated craft, and he pointed a pistol quickly upward, aimed at his own head, and drew trigger.

None saw the act, and when he fell in his tracks prone upon the deck amid a heap of slain, his men believed that the fire of the enemy had killed him.

With irresistible onslaught the boarders came upon the deck, and the victory was won.

A moment stood the young commander gaz-

ing upon the scene, and as his eyes fell upon the dead young captain, he said in a low tone to the handsome young lieutenant already spoken of:

"It is better so, Rossmore."

"Yes, Captain Moncrief, far better than for him to die at the yard-arm," was the answer.

Then arose the cry that the schooner was sinking, and it was found to be too true. She had received her death-wounds, and the water was pouring in torrents into her hold.

A few decisive orders to his well-trained crew and the prisoners and wounded were removed to the deck of the victorious craft, and then the vanquished one was deserted, left to the dead upon her decks.

And not a moment too soon, for the glare of the battle-lanterns showed that the vessel was preparing for her last plunge, and with a lurch forward she went down into the ocean depths.

But ere she sunk a form had risen from her deck, glided to one side, and dropped into a boat that had been hauled inboard.

Like a chip in a whirlpool the boat had been tossed about after the schooner went down, but in it, though half-filled with water, was the one who had sought refuge there.

It was the vanquished schooner's captain, and as he looked over the gunwale at the vessel gliding away in the darkness, he almost shrieked the words:

"*Saved! saved! I yet live for revenge! I will yet sweep the Sea Siren from the deep!*"

CHAPTER II.

A BROTHER'S SACRIFICE.

A SCORE of years prior to the sinking of the schooner, which is told of in the foregoing chapter, two persons stood upon a cliff, jutting out from the bold shores of England.

The one was a young man, dressed in a half-sailor garb, and with a fine face, full of boldness and nobility of soul.

His appearance was that of the English gentleman, and his manners were frank and winning.

The other was a young lady, several years his junior, and with a face that was very beautiful and reflected a pure character.

She was well dressed, and the two had been strolling along the cliff in silence, gazing out upon the blue waters of the sea, lighted up by the falling rays of the sun, hastening toward the horizon, and then again bending their look over on their right, where was visible, sheltered amid a grand park, a superb old mansion.

That it was the home of wealth and refinement all about it indicated, for the grounds were most tastefully laid out, there were vast pastures of choice flowers of all kinds, deer strolled in the parks, and vast stables were in the rear, while the estate numbered many thousand acres.

Stopping in their walk, as they came to a seat beneath a large tree, the young man drew his companion down by his side, and said:

"Sibyl, do you love enough to give up your home yonder for me?"

"How strange a question, Norman?" she answered.

"Answer me, Sibyl."

"Of course I do."

"What if I were to ask you to give up Norman-Hurst Castle, its wealth, its pleasures, and its title, and go with me to another land, what would be your answer?"

"My answer would be, Norman, that where you go, I will go, and what you would endure, I would endure."

"Bless you, my darling, it is just what I expected from your sweet lips."

"But what does this mean, Norman?"

"Listen, and I will tell you, Sibyl."

"You are aware that my two brothers, Rafael and Bianca, I dearly love."

"I well know this, Norman, where they seem to hate you."

"Well, Bianca does, I am sorry to feel, and both of them seem to feel that they are accursed by being younger sons, where I am blest in being the eldest of our parents' children and thus inherited the title and estates of Norman-Hurst."

"Rafael has gone abroad with his regiment, as you know, while I know not what Bianca is doing."

"But all the time I am made to feel by them that they wish I was dead that they might step into my shoes."

"Particularly is this the case with poor, misguided Bianca."

"I pity him, for I know that he loved you devotedly, Sibyl, and had sworn to make you his wife, and when you, loving me, married me, he swore that it was for my title and riches alone."

"I offered to give my brothers one-half of my riches, to share between them, having ample besides, as you know, but they resented the offer, and with Bianca I parted in anger."

"Now, my dear wife, you know that our little son died suddenly, and without seeming illness, and though I would not, for worlds, suspect that it was the cruel work of some one instigated by either of my brothers, still I would take ourselves away from all danger."

"Not that I fear for myself, but for you, Sibyl."

"I understand you, Norman," said the young wife, while the tears came into her eyes at the remembrance of her dead boy, buried a year before.

"Now, Sibyl," continued the gentleman, "I have of late made a large sum of money from profitable speculations, and these, with monies I have laid by will enable us to be very rich people in the New World of America."

"I will place this money so that it can be secretly transferred to a New York banking-house subject to my order, and this will not draw anything from the castle estates proper."

"And you wish to go to the New World, Norman?"

"Yes, Sibyl."

"It will be a sad parting with Old England and all our old associations, Norman."

"True, Sibyl, and gladly would I, under other circumstances, remain at dear old Norman-Hurst Castle and here end our days; but, my wife, I feel so strangely that my brothers should envy me my inheritance, and I feel such dread that one of them may bring only sorrow upon us, that I long to go."

"In America we can be happy, and the riches I take will get us a luxurious home."

"And when will you start, Norman?"

"As soon as I can arrange all to do so; but you have not heard my plan."

"Well, Norman?"

"It is to purchase a fine vessel, a brig, in London, and put on board of her all that we will need to furnish our new home."

"Two old family servants only will we take with us, and we can leave Norman-Hurst in such a way that we are to be supposed to have been lost."

"The stormy season is near at hand, and I will have the brig lie off-shore here on a certain night, while we, in the afternoon, when a gale threatens, can go for a roll in my little yacht, carrying with us the old servants, who shall be let into the secret."

"We will be picked up by the brig, and then set sail for America, while the yacht can be set adrift to drive ashore and give the thought that we have been lost."

"Oh, Norman! but why do this?"

"Because I care nothing for the title of baronet that I bear, nor for the riches of Norman-Hurst, which my brothers crave, and so believing me out of the way, Rafael or Bianca can become the heir, for they can settle it between them, they being, as you know, twins."

"Ah, my husband, you are a noble man, and all that you wish to do you may feel that I will aid you in, for I have only you to love in this world, and wherever you are, there will I be happy."

"Bless you, my beautiful wife, I knew that you would do as I wished in this matter, and now I will set to work arranging all our plans, and within the month we will be bound for the New World, leaving behind us forever England and my envious brothers."

So said Sir Norman Hurst, and within the month the story was told far and wide how he had, one stormy afternoon, against the advice of the old coasters, gone sailing out to sea in his little yacht, accompanied by his trusting wife and two faithful servants, and never came back any more.

The yacht, capsized and dismantled, had been driven ashore, but she was crewless, and all felt that the daring master of Norman-Hurst Castle had brought death upon himself and those with him, and many regretted deeply that the grand estates must fall to the next heir.

But though his yacht had driven ashore, and given truth to the story that those on board had been lost, Sir Norman Hurst and his wife, with their two faithful servants, were flying westward over the broad Atlantic in quest of a new home on the shores of America, having severed every link that chained them to the past, and intending, in the New World, to build up a happy home amid new associations, and a people who knew them not.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISPATCH BRIG.

THE home which Norman Hurst established in America still stands upon the shores of Long Island, and even to-day is one of the grand old homesteads on that isle of comfortable mansions.

As plain Mr. Hurst he was known to his neighbors, while, as he made his brig a coasting craft between New York and Boston, the title of "skipper" and "captain" was afterward added.

Buying a fine farm, with a substantial house already upon it, Captain Hurst added largely to it, until it became one of the grandest homes on the island.

A thousand or more acres surrounded it; there was ample farm-help employed, who dwelt in cottages scattered about the place, and under the master hand of Norman Hurst all prospered.

The grand furniture in the mansion, brought from England, was the admiration of the neigh-

boring farmers, and the mansion itself was the pride of all who dwelt near.

A broad avenue, bordered by elms and Lombardy poplars, led from the highway back to the house, a quarter of a mile distant, and velvet lawns, flower-beds, orchards and kitchen-gardens were upon three sides.

Toward the sea the view was over a meadow to an inlet, or small bay, the landward shores of which were heavily wooded.

A narrow neck of land, overgrown with cedars, protected this inlet, or basin, from the Atlantic, and a break in it was where the sea passed through, and through this vessels of considerable draught could enter under the guidance of a skillful pilot, finding a secure anchorage in a little cove, the shores of which were heavily wooded, but the water deep and pure.

In this cove were anchored several small craft, from a pleasure sloop of thirty tons to a cat-rig boat of one ton burden.

Then there were surf-skiffs, or row-boats and a canoe.

Upon the shore was a pretty arbor, used also as a boat-house.

From here up to the mansion on the hill, nearly a mile away, was a gravel walk, and the piazza running across the sea front of the house commanded a view that was very imposing, taking in as it did miles of the coast up and down, the inlet, cove, meadow, woodland and leagues out to sea, with other homes to be seen in the distance.

Such was the home that Norman Hurst had established in America, and with it paid for, and paying well with farm products, his brig doing a lucrative trade, and money in the bank in New York, he was certainly a prosperous and rich man.

He had wholly cut himself adrift from the past, his associations and his kindred, and in such a way that he and his wife were supposed to be at the bottom of the sea.

Soon after moving into their new home a child was born to the happy couple, a wee little daughter who received the name of Sibyl, after her mother.

Under the tutelage of her parents Sibyl grew apace in lore of all kinds.

Among the luxuries of Hurst Haven was a piano, and Mrs. Hurst was a fine musician, so that the little Sibyl learned to play well, not only upon this, then rare, instrument, but upon the guitar as well.

She possessed a fine voice, it was discovered, as she verged upon womanhood, and so she was taught songs and entertained her parents with her singing.

All the accomplishments, as well as the work, of the household, her mother faithfully taught her, while her father felt that he must do his part also and no better oarswoman could be found along the coast than she, nor one that could equal her in handling a boat under sail.

Frequent were the cruises the family took in the brig, and the pleasure runs up to New York they had in the little sloop, and Sibyl became a thorough sailor, while she could run the vessels in and out of the inlet in the darkest night and worst storms.

As Sibyl grew toward womanhood there fell upon Hurst Haven the first bitter blow that the inmates had known since settling there.

This was the death of Mrs. Hurst, who was taken ill, and quickly passed away in spite of all that could be done for her.

It was a desperate grief to Norman Hurst and his daughter, and they laid her away in a pretty little nook on the farm and returned to the mansion to mourn over their loss.

As the mansion seemed so desolate, Captain Hurst took Sibyl with him for a few months' run upon his packet vessels which plied between New York and Boston, and, of a mechanical turn of mind, the skipper set to work and made a model of a brig which he intended to build, and in which he hoped to obtain both great speed and staunchness.

The struggle of the Revolution had begun, the tocsin of war was ringing from the Carolinas to Massachusetts.

Having adopted America as his home, the sympathies of the skipper were with the Colonies against Great Britain, while Sibyl was heart and soul a Yankee girl.

With his means, and in other ways, Skipper Hurst aided the struggling colonists, and determined to present his new vessel, if she proved all that he expected of her, to the Government as a cruiser, for Sibyl would not hear of his carrying her out himself as a privateer.

At last the *Mermaid*, as she was called, was completed, and upon her trial run, with her master and Sibyl on deck, so quickly dropped all other vessels known to be fast, astern, that Captain Hurst sailed in her, with his picked crew, to present her to the Government.

But upon his arrival in New York he was at once requested to load her with arms, ammunition, and military stores, and start with all dispatch for the Carolinas, to relieve the Colonial armies struggling there.

The service was just to his liking, and one pleasant afternoon, loaded deep with her most valuable cargo, and bearing important dispatches, Captain Hurst set sail for Charleston.

His first mate was none other than Sibyl, who was thoroughly competent to take the position, and his second mate was Hugh Bronx, the son of an old sea-captain who had left his wife and two children, a son and daughter, a fine farm near Hurst Haven.

Hugh was a fine sailor, a handsome fellow, and desperately in love with Sibyl, and he had been a trifle wild until her urging had won him from his evil ways.

There was also on the brig a young sailor by the name of Rossmore, a dashing, handsome fellow, who acted as boatswain, and a crew of half a score of tars, the very best human timber that Captain Hurst could pick from the crews of his different packet-ships.

Under such circumstances was it that the *Mermaid* set sail from New York, bound upon her perilous run to the Carolinas.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND.

AMONG the Bahamas there is an island of rock, which has something of a resemblance to the Rock of Gibraltar, and certainly it is almost as impregnable from its natural standpoint.

It rises out of the sea, which is dotted for leagues about it with innumerable rocky islets and reefs, and the approach to it is on that account, most difficult and dangerous, requiring the most skillful pilotage to reach it, even in calm weather.

The island is some thirty acres in size, with bold sides, forming sheer precipices, the lowest of which is nearly a hundred feet in height.

It has an utterly barren and desolate look, from all sides to seaward, and that a human being could gain footing thereon would seem impossible.

And yet this rock was inhabited at the time of which I write, and within its seemingly unbroken walls was a chasm, though not visible to an eye a few cables' length distant, yet ran through the solid rock into the interior, at an oblique, so that the entrance was not noticed, along with the other breaks and jagged buttresses.

This chasm was some sixty feet in width, deep enough to admit a line-of-battle-ship, and towered over the topmasts of a vessel upon either side.

Having penetrated the outer wall the channel opened into a basin several acres in size, surrounded upon all sides except one, by rocky shelves, from ten to fifty feet in height.

The exception was a space of a hundred feet, where there was a sandy beach, upon which were drawn a dozen or more small boats of all descriptions.

In the basin, anchored fore and aft in a circle from the entrance, were half a score of vessels, from a clumsy lugger of sixty tons and a trim Cuban *goleta*, to an old armed schooner and a large barque of six hundred tons.

Sloping up from the sandy beach was a grassy lawn, dotted here and there by trees, and running back to the base of the overhanging wall of rock, where the timber grew quite thick and heavy.

There were cabins near the shore, half a dozen in number, built of ship-timbers, and back in the woods was a larger one, and about it an air of comfort.

Rudely fenced in gardens were in another part of the island interior, in which were growing various kinds of vegetables, fruit trees were scattered about here and there, and about the open space were roaming a few cattle, some sheep, and numerous fowls.

It was sunset, and men that were fishing, and with considerable luck it seemed, from the rocky shelves around the basin, arose and moved toward the row of cabins, before each one of which was a fire blazing brightly, for the evening meal was being prepared.

Two-score of men altogether were visible, some of them on crutches, others with an arm in a sling, or scars from recent wounds, and about as many more who were not apparently wounded.

They were a hard looking lot, and Africans, Cubans, Spaniards, Mexicans, French and English were the nationalities represented.

Near the fires were rude tables, with benches, upon either side, and the fare set forth by the cooks, of fried fish, meats, roasted potatoes, bread, coffee and red wines was certainly very tempting to the appetite.

Near the cabin back in the timber was a fire also burning briskly, and two negroes bustled briskly about it.

The table set near was loaded down with rare old silver plate, massive coffee-urns and mugs, and the supper was better cooked and really very delicious.

Swinging in a hammock under the shed, that served as a piazza covering for the cabin, was a young man of striking appearance.

His face was darkly bronzed by exposure to the elements, but was now wan and wore traces of recent suffering.

It was a face full of power, and the features were perfect.

A sternness rested upon the mouth, that was strange in one so young, and the eyes were large, fascinating and full of fire.

"Supper's ready, Massa Cap'n," said one of the negroes, advancing from the fire and saluting.

"All right, Mingo, and I am ready for supper, for I am getting well fast," lightly answered the young man, and he arose slowly from the hammock, the act displaying a tall, commanding form, attired in a red silk shirt, open blue velvet jacket, white pants and a small cap of gold wrought thread, on the center of which glittered a diamond anchor.

A sash of the same gold-thread work was about his slender waist, and in it were a jeweled hilted stiletto and a couple of pistols.

Taking from a peg on the cabin wall a short, serviceable sword, he swung it upon the gold chains suspended from his belt and walked toward the table.

It was now dark, and battle lanterns gave ample light by which to discuss the meal, which consisted of deliciously cooked fish, a broiled chicken, some biscuit, a salad, and all washed down by a fine old wine, the bottle having been emptied into one of the huge silver tankards before alluded to.

Mingo and his assistant Jocko—so-called from his most striking resemblance to a monkey—waited upon the young islander, the latter handing him a cigar and a live coal in a pair of tongs, to light it from, after his supper was over.

As he puffed the fragrant smoke from his lips the young man started, for upon his ears fell the deep boom of a heavy gun, evidently not a great distance from the island.

The same sound brought the group of men also to their feet, and they started on a run for the top of the rocky wall that surrounded the island, while the young man said, quietly:

"It is my father returning; but I did not expect him so soon."

CHAPTER V.

BIANCA, THE BUCCANEER.

THE first man of the group before the cabins who reached the top of the cliff, at once dragged out of a cavity in the rocks a spy-glass and bent it out over the dark waters.

There he beheld a vessel lying to, and yet showing no light.

Instantly he stepped into the rocky cavity, which was a small cave, and came out with several lighted lanterns in his hands.

One of these, a red one, he placed on the edge of the cliff, at his feet, and then he held his arms out at length on either side, the right hand holding a green lantern, the left a blue.

Almost instantly a glare was visible upon the bows of the schooner, and a red hand and arm were visible, the former grasping a red torch.

It was the figurehead of the vessel, and lighted up by some strange device, so as to display fully the red hand grasping the flaming torch.

"It is the Sea Torch, of course," muttered the man on the cliff, and attaching a rope to his red lantern he lowered it over the rocky wall until it hung about ten feet above the waters, and upon one side of the entrance to the channel.

The blue light he left on the edge of the cliff where it could be seen from the vessel out on the sea, and going along the edge of the chasm, which looked down into the channel far below, he lowered half a dozen lights as a guide for the incoming craft.

Then he retraced his way to the cliff, where his comrades had assembled and were gazing at the vessel, which was slowly approaching over the dark waters.

Back from the cliff, and covered with canvas in such a way as to look like jutting rocks, were several heavy ship guns, mounted on carriages so that they could be run at will to different points and fired, and thereby completely command the channel entrance.

About these were grouped the men, and all were watching the coming in of the vessel which had been called the Sea Torch, for so dangerous was the gantlet to run that its progress held a fascination for the islanders in gazing at its approach through the rock-guarded channel.

"She's back weeks afore we expected her, mates," said the man whose duty it had been to signal and light the lanterns.

"Yes, but she's alone, so the chief couldn't have met with big luck," responded another.

The vessel coming in was a schooner, and an armed one, as could be seen by the battle lanterns on her decks.

She had a large crew on board, who stood in silence at their posts of duty, while the craft came on under just enough sail to work easily in.

Approaching the rocky gateway, she bore toward the light hanging down near the water, shaved it closely and glided into the chasm, her pilot following the row of lanterns that hung on the side of the wall.

As she neared the basin sail was taken in and she slowly moved out of the chasm into the open water.

Her headway carried her nearly across to the sandy beach and there the anchor was let fall and a boat lowered.

The signal man, as the one who had tended the lanterns was called, had raised his lights, as the schooner passed it, put them out, and re-

placing them in the cave had gone to the shore, where he had met the boat as it landed.

In the stern-sheets stood a tall form, who sprang ashore as the boat grounded, and to the salutes of his men said in a deep voice:

"Good-evening, lads."

Seeing the signal man, he said:

"Well, Brent, I had to fire to wake you up."

"I know it, chief, but as you are a month ahead of time, I was not on the alert, sir."

"True, I am ahead of time, as you say, and there is a reason for it; but how is the captain?"

"Improving rapidly, sir."

"I am glad of this, for I was anxious about him, as that was an ugly wound he got."

"It was, chief."

"And all goes well, Brent?"

"Yes, chief."

The two had been walking along, as they talked, going toward the cabin in the edge of the timber.

Upon the fire Jocko had thrown some armfuls of brush and light wood, and it burned brightly, revealing the young man returned to his hammock, and idly smoking.

Mingo was bustling about getting supper again, for he seemed to understand that a demand would be made upon the larder by the new arrival.

As he neared the light the new-comer was seen to be a man of large proportions, with a heavily bearded, stern face, and eyes that seemed to fairly blaze with their brightness.

He was dressed in a sea uniform of a hundred years ago, and was heavily armed, with a huge cutlass and a belt full of pistols.

Stern to savageness he looked, and yet his bearing, his words, indicated that he had been born a gentleman.

"Well, father, welcome home," called out the young man in the hammock, stretching forth one of his small hands, upon which glistened a number of rings set with rare jewels.

"I am glad to see you almost well, as it were, my son, heartily glad, for I have worried about you," and the visitor threw himself in a chair near the hammock, which Jocko had placed for him.

"Oh, I am all right, father, and I may say about well."

"Your wound gives you no pain now?"

"Very little at times."

"It was a close call for your life, Bianca."

"It was, indeed, sir, for his blade pierced my left lung."

"I did not believe man could handle blade better than you, Bianca."

"Nor did I, father; but we all meet our match sometimes," said the young man with a smile.

"By Neptune you are right, Bianca, for I have met mine."

"You, father?"

"Fact," and the old man smiled grimly.

"Tell me of it, father."

"It was that young American who is called the Dashing Privateersman who wounded you, Bianca."

"Why, father?"

"True, he nearly killed you, and beat you back, when you thought so cleverly to capture his craft with your boats that night, and, as you said, bettered you in your blade combat with him, and now he has gotten the best of me."

"Tell me how, I beg of you, sir."

"First, have you been to supper?"

"Only just finished, sir, and Mingo is ready for you, I see."

"Good, for I enjoy Mingo's cooking so well, I did not sup on my schooner, hoping to catch you ere you had yours."

"Now to eat, and afterward, during a smoke, to tell you of the way I was worsted by Manton Moncrief, the Dashing Privateersman."

"But there'll come a day for my revenge, as sure as I fly the seas under the name of Bianca, the Buccaneer," and the old pirate sprang to his feet as he uttered the words with savage intensity, and strode toward the supper-table, which Mingo had again spread with all that was tempting in the way of supper.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUCCANEER'S STORY.

HAVING feasted himself, as he expressed it, in a way that greatly tickled Mingo, the man who had spoken of himself as Bianca, the Buccaneer, returned to the shelter of the piazza, hung up his belt of arms, within reach, and lighting a pipe, threw himself into an easy-chair, fronting his son as he lay in the hammock, still smoking a fragrant cigar.

"Did you enjoy your supper, father?"

"I feasted, my son, and am now in good humor for talking."

"I feel that you have something of importance to tell, for you are back full a month ahead of time."

"I am."

"And Jocko says that you brought no prizes in with you?"

"True, and it is all I could do to keep from being taken in as a prize myself."

"Well, sir, to your story, that I may not die

of curiosity," said the young man, with a smile.

"Well, Bianca, to tell you all that has happened I must go back a number of years, for I wish to make known to you a secret of my past life."

"I am ready, sir, to hear all."

"You know that I am English?"

"Yes, father."

"I am one of those accursed beings, a younger son, and hence I was a nobody about a lordly mansion in England, where an elder brother was the grand mogul."

"He inherited the title and estates, and I and my twin brother, for there were three of us, got a mere pittance."

"This was a bitter blow to me, it soured my disposition, darkened my whole life."

"As I grew older I hated my elder brother, though he had, I must admit, ever been most kind to me, and helped me out of a number of scrapes my wild life got me into."

"When home on a visit I met a woman I loved."

"She was a noble girl, beautiful, and still in her teens."

"I loved her with my whole soul, and hoped to make her my wife; but she refused me, and became the wife of my elder brother."

"Then I hated him the more, and I became revengeful."

"I got my revenge in a way that was cruel to them, but it gave me joy, for I struck at the life of their first-born, a boy."

"I hired a woman, who was his nurse, to poison him."

"It was like you, as I know you, father," was the cool remark of the pirate's son.

"You do not know me as well as you think, boy," was the grim response.

"Having begun my red work, it occurred to me that if my brother was out of the way the title would fall upon my twin brother or myself, the latter then being away in foreign lands with his regiment."

"If there was any doubt as to which one of us, being twins, should inherit the title and estates, I knew it would be easy enough for my other brother to die in battle, provided I furnished the recruit to go there and kill him in the heat of action."

"Unfortunately for my plans, however, my evil temper got the better of me one night at a royal ball, where I took exception to a slight, for I was not popular, and struck an *aide* of the king."

"A combat followed, and I ran him through the body."

"This forced me to fly, and especially as I learned that I was to be betrayed by the nurse who had poisoned my brother's child, the crime sitting too heavily upon her conscience for her to keep it."

"Leaving England I took to the sea, for I had been a middy in the navy in early life, and fate drove me straight into a piratical career, for I was captured by an Algerine corsair who took a fancy to my style of fighting, spared my life and made me a lieutenant."

"I should have told you, however, that my twin brother, while in India, had married a Hindoo princess, and her sister, a beautiful girl of sixteen, had returned with him to England."

"When ordered away with his regiment, he had left her at an elegant home in London, for he got vast riches through her, and there I met her and her sister."

"I was flattered by the admiration the young sister gave me, and I made her my wife."

"It was very shortly after this that I was forced to fly from England and leave her; but when I proved to my Algerine captain that I was true as steel to him, I was allowed to return to England after my bride."

"I did so in disguise, my brother was still absent, and I ran off with my own wife."

"That woman, that beautiful East Indian girl, Bianca, was your mother, and you were born at sea, in the cabin of an Algerine corsair, a few weeks after my return to my chief."

"Seeing that I had been true to him, he made me a *Rais** and I had my own vessel."

"I secured me a palace in Algeria, adopted the faith of Mohammed, and for long years dwelt there, accumulating riches."

"One night an English fleet ran into the bay near my home, silenced our forts, sacked the town, and my palace was in ruins, and all my riches gone."

"Returning some days after, for I was away from home at the time, I found only wreck and poverty, while my wife, and you my son, I was told had been carried off on an English schooner, one of the fleet, for your mother had begged to be taken back to London, wishing to return to her sister."

"I pursued the English fleet, and came upon the schooner-of-war cruising along the coast."

"I recognized her at once from the description, beat to quarters and attacked her."

"It was a desperate battle, but I won at last and captured the Englishman, to find that my own guns had slain my wife, where she lay ill in the cabin, and you were bending over her as

* Captain.

I entered, trying to wake her up, for mere child that you were you thought she was asleep."

"The vessel was in a sinking condition, and hastily transferring what booty I had and my best guns to the deck of the English schooner, I gained my revenge by confining the English crew, who would not volunteer to serve under me, in the cabin of my corsair craft, and letting her go down with them to the bottom of the sea."

"Your revenge is terrible, father."

"It is, my son; but I have told you now of my past and yours, for you are aware that you have been reared by me upon a pirate deck."

"I am well aware of that fact, father, and I am glad that you have become a wide sea rover, and did not longer remain an Algerine corsair, after my poor mother's death."

"But you have more to tell, sir?"

"Yes; I did not tell you that when I returned to England after your mother, I learned that my eldest brother, who was titled and the inheritor of the vast estates that went with the title, had been lost at sea, along with the woman who had refused my love for his."

"His wife?"

"Yes, his wife."

"And both were lost?"

"Yes, for they had sailed one afternoon in the face of a storm, accompanied by two servants, and they had never been seen again, while the wrecked yacht drifting ashore had made known their fate."

"Then upon you fell the title and estates?"

"Such would have been the case had I not been a fugitive, but I dared not return and claim them."

"Too bad, for I would rather be an English heir to a title than a pirate," said the young man, bitterly.

"True, and you may yet get all, my son; but let me tell you that your uncle, my brother, was not lost as was supposed."

"Not lost in that storm?"

"No, for he lives, and I captured the vessel that he was commander of only ten days ago," was the response of Bianca, and his voice fairly quivered while he uttered the words.

CHAPTER VII.

DRIVEN FROM HIS PREY.

THE young man, who was the son of one who had proclaimed himself a pirate, had listened to his father's story with outward coolness, only now and then making a comment or asking a question, as the reader has seen.

What he felt in his heart he did not show.

His was a calm nature, unless deeply moved, and his smile had been half cynical, during the story.

He seemed to have dreaded that his father might tell him some bitter story as to his birth, and as to who his mother was, and a sigh of relief had come from him when he learned the truth.

When his father had spoken of his crimes against his brother, and his career as an Algerine corsair, with his cruel revenge upon those of the schooner that had taken his wife from his home, Captain Bianca, as the young man was called, had seemed to take all as a matter of course.

But when he had spoken of having met once more the brother, long believed to be dead, the young man had shown the deepest interest.

"You mean that your brother lives?" he asked.

"I do."

"You mean the one whom the luck of birth made the heir and noble?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"I know him but too well."

"Tell me of it all."

"I will, and you can see for yourself how I held all in my power."

"I am deeply interested in knowing, father, and wonder what it was that could make you let go your grip."

"I will tell you."

"I sighted a craft, while cruising off the mouth of the Delaware some dozen leagues, that I gave chase to."

"The vessel struck me as of remarkable trim rig and build, and seeing that she was dropping me rapidly—"

"Dropping the Sea Torch, sir?"

"She did, rapidly."

"She must have been very fast."

"Remarkably so, and she would have shown me a clean pair of heels had I not opened a hot fire and crippled her."

"But, crippled as she was she held on, and you know that a stern chase is a long one."

"I hoped, during the night to come up with her, by fast sailing, for I did not wish to hurt the pretty craft any more than was necessary, as her speed at all points, for the wind boxed the compass while I was chasing her, showed me that she was just the vessel I needed."

"With a brig like her and the Sea Torch, we would be well fixed, my son."

"But you did not get her?"

"I did."

"And she is under a prize crew on her way here now?"

"Don't run ahead of my story, Bianca."
 "I am all attention, sir."
 "Well, I at last discovered that, crippled though she was, she would get away from me, and so I opened a hot fire again."
 "I did her still greater harm, in her rig, for with the Sea Torch under all she could carry, I began to sneak up on her."
 "I could see that my fire had done some damage upon her decks too, and, as I drew nearer discovered that a woman held the wheel."
 "A woman, father?"
 "Yes, a young girl, as I afterwards discovered."
 "Well, I at last got near, she lay to and I boarded."
 "I saw that her crew was small, half a score in number, and several had been killed and wounded."
 "They were grouped together amidships, excepting several who stood to windward aft, near the wheel, and there lay the skipper, his leg shattered by my fire."
 "The young girl was his daughter, and she stood near, and faced me as I approached, while two young seamen were supporting the wounded skipper."
 "In that wounded man, Bianca, I recognized my brother, and the maiden who had stood so long at the wheel of the brig, holding her so well on her course, was his daughter."
 "Yes, she was the daughter of the woman who had cast my love aside to marry my brother, and I fairly started as I saw the striking resemblance that she was to her beautiful mother."
 "Then I grew revengeful, Bianca, very revengeful, and I made up my mind that the brig should be mine, with her valuable cargo, for she was carrying military supplies to the rebel American armies, who are fighting the king, and I thought I saw a way to get pardon for my offenses in the past, no one knowing me as Bianca, the Buccaneer."
 "That not a shadow of doubt should exist, as to my brother's death, I determined to hang him to the yard-arm—"
 "Your own brother, sir?"
 "Why not?"
 "And wounded you say he was, father?"
 "Yes."
 "And you would hang him, and not wait for him to die?"
 "Yes, for he might not die, and I wanted no accidents to cut me out of my title and inheritance, if I should gain pardon of my king for having slain his aide."
 "Well, father, you have your own peculiar way of arranging matters to suit you; but what did you do?"
 "I told my men to get a rope, and I made known to the girl, Sibyl, that I should hang her father, and that she should go with me."
 "It seemed that nothing could prevent my carrying out my plan, when out of the breaking dawn came a shot."
 "It fairly startled me, and at a glance I recognized my foe."
 "It was none other than that young American privateersman, Manton Moncrief, and I knew that I had no time to lose."
 "Not with Captain Moncrief after you, sir, I can well understand that."
 "I at once boarded my schooner, intending to beat the privateer off, and then return to my prize; but I reckoned wrong, I very soon found out, for that Moncrief is not a man to beat off, and he drove me to flight to save my vessel."
 "And you lost your prize?"
 "I did, along with my revenge; but it is only for awhile, as I shall follow my brother to the bitter end."
 "He may die of his wound, sir."
 "I shall assure myself that such is the case."
 "And his daughter, sir?"
 "I have a place in store for her, my son," and the remark was uttered in a tone savagely significant.

CHAPTER VIII. THE PIRATE SPY.

AFTER some further conversation with his father, Captain Bianca learned that the Sea Torch had been considerably damaged in her flight from the privateer, and that he had suffered heavily in his crew, so had been unable to continue on his cruise, but had returned to the Island Bastille, as they called their outlaw fortress.

There were ways there for hauling the vessels out upon for repairs, and no better ship-carpenters could be found than those among the buccaneers, while the numerous prizes taken had furnished all that was needful in the way of spars, rigging, and canvas.

"And now what is your intention, father?" asked the young man.

"You are not, of course, well enough to go on an expedition?"

"Hardly yet, father."

"Well, I shall have the Sea Torch out in the morning, and put all the best men at work upon her."

"She is very foul, I know, and her wounds have simply been patched up."

"I shall put her in perfect trim, giving her

new topmasts, another main-boom and gaff, and a ten-feet longer bowsprit, so that she can spread more sail."

"I shall rig her out anew, and I think we can get one-fourth more speed out of her, and then she will about equal the brig."

"But, my son, I wish to find out all about that brig, and so shall send a spy to do some work for me, as you are not able to do it."

"What is the work, father?"

"The brig sailed for Charleston, and I will send my man there, and I wish him to get me an exact model of the craft throughout."

"I wish to know if my brother is dead, and if so, where his daughter is."

"If he is not dead, I desire to know just where he makes his home, what he has been doing, and all about him."

"Then I desire to know all that I can learn regarding this young privateersman, for I will be avenged on him, and it will be a glorious day for me if I can capture his craft."

"These are wild times, my son, and I might as well have a corsair fleet as not, and several fleet cruisers under the Black Flag would make me rich as a king."

"You, as you know, are second to me in all things, and my heir—"

"A pirate's heir?" and the young man smiled.

"True, and a pirate who will leave you the wealth of a king."

"But to my plan of sending a spy to Charleston, or wherever the brig may be, what do you say, my son?"

"I can see nothing against it, sir, especially as to his getting the model of the brig, for we can, by getting a cargo of timber from Baltimore, build as fine a craft right here as can be launched anywhere in the world, and I confess to a desire to sail on a vessel that can drop any pursuer."

"You are right, my son, and that brig can do it, for candidly, if I add one-third to the speed of the Sea Torch, I feel that she could not catch that slippery craft."

"Now, who shall I select for a spy?"

"You wish a man who can be a gentleman at will, or an ordinary seaman if there is need for it?"

"Yes."

"Why not send Officer Basil, sir?"

"The very man, if I can trust him."

"Why, can you not?"

"Well, you know you captured him on a prize, and I offered his life if he would serve as an officer."

"And no officer has better attended to the duties devolving upon him, father?"

"True, but I fear he will desert if he gets the chance."

"Leave him to me, sir, to deal with, and back me up in all I tell him."

"All right; I'll send for him," and Jocko was called and dispatched on board the Sea Torch after the officer, who was acting as second lieutenant on board the pirate schooner.

In a short while he arrived, and Bianca motioned him to a seat, at the same time telling Jocko to throw more wood upon the fire, to make a brighter light, and then to bring some silver tankards of wine.

The officer sent for was a man of thirty, with a dark face, black hair and eyes, and withal very attractive looking.

He possessed a well-knit form, was quiet in his movements, dignified and courteous.

"I am glad to see you better, Captain Bianca," he said pleasantly, as he sat down.

"Thank you, Basil, and I owe it to you that I am not dead, for but for your rushing in and checking that dashing privateer captain's sword-thrust, he would have ended me."

"I saw your danger, sir, and am sorry I was not able to prevent your wound, but I never saw a blade wielded as he did it, and though, when I caught you in my arms as you fell, three of my men sprung upon him, he beat them back and very nearly prevented our reaching the boats with you."

"Oh he's a marvel with a blade, cool as ice in action, and a daring, deadly foe, and few men could have saved me as you did."

"I thank you, sir."

"And I thank you, Basil, for I love my son, as you know, pirate though I am," said the chief with deep feeling.

"Basil, I have sent for you to go on a special mission, for I have volunteered for you, and pledge my word for you that you will do it."

"I will do all in my power, Captain Bianca," was the modest reply.

"You of course, being on the Sea Torch, know how she was outsailed by a brig, even though crippled, and that you were beaten off from your prize by this same dashing privateersman who wounded me?"

"Yes, sir, I saw all."

"What do you think of the brig?"

"She's the finest craft I ever saw afloat, sir."

"You are an American, I believe?"

"I am, sir."

"And you are a pirate out of necessity?"

"About that, sir," and the young officer smiled.

"Well, Basil, my father wishes you to go to Charleston and get a correct model of that brig,

find out just who her captain is if he died of his wound, where he lives, and where his daughter is?"

"Yes, sir."

"He desires that you find out when she is to sail, what her crew will be, where bound, and also all you can regarding the movements of the privateer cruiser under Moncrief."

"I understand, sir."

"You are to do this, and then go to Baltimore, purchase the timber for a vessel like the brig, load it on board some craft and bring her off this port, when, if the Sea Torch is not here, I will run out in the old schooner and bring you in."

"And when am I to go, sir?"

"At once, for you can go in the lugger to the nearest port in the Carolinas, where you can land, and the craft can return here."

"I am ready, sir."

"You are to live like a gentleman, Basil, or be able to assume any character you may wish, and also have money to purchase the ship timber; so you shall be supplied liberally with gems which you can readily turn into gold, as you need it."

"Yes, sir, and it is kind of you to put this trust in me."

"I shall make your reward, Basil, your freedom on your return, if you wish it, with ten thousand dollars as a gift."

"And fail me, and I'll hunt you down to the ends of the earth, and hang you!" sternly said the old chief.

But Basil did not flinch at the threat, and replied:

"You may depend upon me, Captain Bianca, for I have not forgotten that I also owe you my life."

"I am ready to go, sir, at any time."

An hour after a lugger ran out of the island basin, with a crew of half a dozen men on board, her commander being Basil, the young pirate lieutenant, bound on his mission as a spy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPY AT WORK.

FROM the boat-house, in front of a handsome mansion whose extensive and beautiful grounds ran to the water's edge, a light skiff shot out, urged by the hands of a young girl.

It was a frail little boat, barely able to hold the one who was sending it swiftly along over the waters, and yet it was headed boldly out upon the broad waters of Charleston Harbor as though the fair oarsman held no fear.

And fair she was, for her face, sheltered by a fancy sun-hat, was beautiful—a beauty that could not but fascinate one who beheld her.

Her eyes were large, dark-blue, and looked black, under the long, heavy lashes that shaded them.

Her lips were ruby red, and the teeth beneath were even and white as milk.

A rosy hue rested upon her cheeks, looking like the glow on a peach, through her bronzed complexion, for it was browned by sun and breeze.

Her hair, worn in a coil, was a rich auburn, and presenting with her bronze complexion and black brows and lashes, a happy medium between a blonde and brunette.

Her form was faultless, clothed in a pretty soft blue material, and her every movement as she rowed along was most graceful.

Straight out over the waters she rowed, unmindful of a storm that was sweeping up into the heavens, for her back was to it, while her face was turned upon the scene she was leaving.

The mansion she had left was one of the grandest that bordered the shores below the then small town of Charleston.

Its verandas were spacious, its rooms many, and it was the home of hospitality and luxury, being the residence of the commandant of the harbor forts.

About it were grounds filled with ornamental trees, *parterres* of flowers and velvet lawns.

Pretty arbors were to be seen here and there, reached by white gravel walks, and the boat-house on the shore was quite an elaborate and handsome affair.

The view stretched far down the bay, out to sea, over to the Ashley River, and then along the shore dotted with villas, as the eyes wandered on to the town, above which were anchored numerous vessels of all kinds and sizes, and among them could be seen several war craft.

It was near the hour of twilight, and the pretty oarswoman had rested upon her oars, far out upon the waters, as though she had rowed far enough, and was about to turn back, when a lurid glare of lightning came before her eyes, nearly blinding her, and it was followed by a peal of thunder that seemed to fairly shake the waters.

In an instant she felt her danger, for she now saw that one of those sudden tornadoes, that are common in southern latitudes, was about to burst upon her.

The heavens were rapidly becoming overcast, and a darkness like nightfall was settling upon land and sea, while the roaring of the coming tempest was appalling.

No human hand could have sent that frail skiff back to the shore before the tornado struck

it, and that it would live an instant in the wild sea the maiden could not believe.

But her eyes fell upon a sail that was near at hand.

It was a small, but stanch sail-boat, and it was heading straight toward her, while the daring skipper at its helm was holding on to his full sail in the very teeth of the coming tempest.

"Pull toward me with all your strength, and as I luff spring on board!"

The voice was clear, calm and commanding, and the maiden obeyed, knowing that it was her only hope.

A moment more and she struck the side of the little craft with a crash, a strong hand grasped her arm and almost rudely lifted her into the cockpit, while springing forward he let his mainsail come down with a run, and under jib alone met the gale.

"Make fast the sail, sir, as best you can, and I will head her off before the gale," cried the young girl, as she sprung to the tiller, at the same time trying to tie down the folds of the fluttering mainsail.

"Ay, ay, miss, it is the best we can do; but the storm will strike us within a minute," came back the answer in a voice that was cheery in the face of the approaching storm.

A moment more and the howling winds and surging waters were upon the devoted craft.

The little vessel was hurled forward bodily, and it seemed must be swamped beneath the wild waves that were driven on by the winds; but she rallied, and with just a miniature of her jib set, for the skipper had lowered and reefed it, she went bounding away before the mad hurricane.

"I shall drive before it around the point, miss, and try and come up under the lee of the land in the other river," said the skipper, and he tried to pierce the gloom to know how to steer.

"That light, sir, is in the mansion where I am visiting, and if you will bear away to larboard a few points, we will round the point," said the maiden, showing no sign of fear, as she pointed out a red light half a mile away.

"You are as plucky as any man I ever saw, miss, answered the man, in admiration at her uter fearlessness.

"I do not fear a blow, sir, but see, we can soon round the point, for there is the light-house now, the lamp being just lit, and the wind is not so fierce as it was, and we can get under the lee of the land," was the reply.

"You are right, miss, and all danger is over now," was the cool reply and ten minutes after the little craft was run close inshore under the lee of the point, upon which stood several large houses that afforded a good shelter.

After half an hour's delay the wind lulled and the little sloop was run in alongside of a pier, where her skipper made fast, and then aided the maiden ashore.

"Permit me to escort you home, miss, as this is a desolate neighborhood at night," he said, politely.

"I accept your offer with pleasure, sir, and I regret that I have been so much trouble to you, though you have the satisfaction of knowing that you saved me from death, as my skill could not have lived an instant."

"That thought more than repays me, lady, and I am glad that I was tempted to enjoy a sail this afternoon."

"I saw your danger and so headed toward you, and fortunate am I in having done so."

"Thanks can never repay you for your service, sir; but let me introduce myself as Miss Sibyl Hurst; and at present my father, who has been a great sufferer from a dangerous wound, is visiting with me at the home of Major Perry White—it is yonder where you see those lights, so you will not have far to go with me," and she spoke in a pleasant, frank manner that was very winning, and caused her companion to respond:

"Allow me, Miss Hurst, to introduce myself as Basil Brandon, a coast planter, at present on a business visit to Charleston."

Sibyl held out her hand in her frank way, and said:

"After our acquaintance, begun as it was, I feel that we shall be friends; but here we are at the mansion, and you must come in with me—nay, I will not hear of a refusal, Mr. Brandon, for you must come and meet my father."

Thus urged the young man ascended to the veranda with her, where Major White, a handsome old soldier, and half a dozen soldiers were preparing to search for her, for only a short while before it had been discovered that she was not in her room.

The major greeted the young man warmly, insisted that he should remain to supper with them, and then Basil Brandon was presented to Captain Norman Hurst, a handsome man of fifty, though looking white and haggard as he sat in his easy-chair, for he had lately suffered amputation of a limb.

The tears came into his fine eyes as Sibyl told the story of her rescue, and how Mr. Basil Brandon, who could readily have run to safety in his sloop, had risked his life to save her.

"God bless you, Mr. Brandon, and a father's blessings ever attend you," was the earnest reply.

Remaining to supper Basil Brandon proved himself to be a most entertaining personage, and his manners were refined and elegant.

Urged to remain, when he started to go, he spent the entire evening, but at last took his departure, muttering, as he wended his way back to his boat, to sail it around to the place he had started from:

"Now I know all that there is to know; but I have made up my mind as to one thing regarding that lovely girl, and that is—"

He said no more, but springing upon the deck of his little sloop cast off and went flying away over the dark waters.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN OF THE SPY.

TOWARD the close of the day, two months after the departure of the pirate spy, on his mission to Charleston, a large schooner was sighted by the lookout on the Island Bastille, running directly toward the huge rock.

As she drew nearer a flag went up to the fore, displaying a blue field, in the center of which a red hand grasped a flaming torch.

Instantly a signal was made by the lookout, down to the sandy shore of the basin, and a surf-skiff containing two persons put out and ran toward the schooner, which lay to off the island at a distance of half a league.

Boarding the schooner, one of the men stepped to the wheel and the craft was headed at once for the channel running into the rock.

The schooner was a large, awkward-looking craft, battered and storm-stained; but she sailed well and ran into an anchorage near the shore, and put under the stern of the old armed schooner, which has previously been spoken of, and which was now undergoing repairs.

The Sea Torch, looking splendidly in her new rig and paint, was anchored near the entrance and all ready for sea; but her chief was ashore at the cabin of the young captain, and thither went Basil Brandon, for he it was who had come in the schooner.

"Back again, Basil, and you are welcome, for I am all ready for sea," said the old chief, as the young officer approached where the father and son sat talking together, both of them delighted over the reported return of the spy.

"You have done well, I feel, Basil," said Captain Bianca, grasping the hand of the lieutenant.

"I think I have done all that you expected of me, sir," was the modest reply.

"Well, to your story, Basil, while Mingo is preparing supper," the chief said.

"Well, sir, as the crew of the lugger doubtless reported to you, I landed at a small port on the coast, and thence made my way to Charleston."

"I entered the town on horseback, professing to be a coast planter, and put up at the best inn."

"My inquiries soon discovered that the brig, known as the Mermaid, had entered the port in a sadly crippled condition, her skipper seriously wounded, and the vessel under command of the captain's daughter, who was her first mate."

It was said that the brig had been rescued from the grip of Bianca, the Buccaneer, by the former privateer schooner under Moncrief, who has been made a lieutenant in the American Navy.

"He sent his surgeon on board the brig to care for the skipper, and thus his life was saved, and he was taken to the home of Major Perry White, the Commandant of the forts at Charleston, and an old friend of Captain Hurst."

"The brig's cargo was said to be worth its weight in gold, and not only did Captain Moncrief save it from you, Chief Bianca, but also from a large British brig-of-war."

"That man, Moncrief, seems to be invulnerable."

"So the people of Charleston believe him now, sir, though the Englishman captured his vessel and ran down with his prize and anchored off the town."

"In some way Captain Moncrief escaped, swam ashore, and discovered that the mate of the brig Mermaid, one Hugh Bronx, a reckless young fellow, had gotten a large crew on board a merchant barque, and run out to capture the Englishman and retake the schooner."

"But Bronx and his barque were captured instead, while Captain Moncrief selected a large force, in boats with muffled oars, went down and retook his schooner, set the barque on fire, after releasing the prisoners, and then captured the British brig-of-war, coming up to the town with his prizes."

"He is a wonderful man," said young Bianca.

"Satan is his patron saint!" the old chief hissed.

"He is a wonderful man, sir," continued Basil, "and he will make a still greater name for himself now, as Captain Hurst presented him with the Mermaid, which has been altered into a schooner and armed in splendid style."

"Then there is no hope of our getting her?" sadly said the chief.

"I have, sir, her complete model, rig as a schooner, armament and all, for I got the drawings by paying a negro steward on board to steal them for me, so that I copied them, as I am a good draughtsman."

"And the privateer schooner?"

"Captain Moncrief sold her, with her privateering papers, to the young mate of the Mermaid, who intends turning privateersman."

"Ah! then we may get her from him. But about the timber for the new vessel?"

"I bought all that was needed, sir, and the very best, in Baltimore, with new rigging, spars and canvas, and have all on board the schooner."

"What crew have you?"

"I picked up, as you suggested, Chief Bianca, about thirty good men; shipping them, as I told them, for desperate work, so that you will have ample for two crews, and a few to remain on the island."

"That is good, and they will come in well, while, my son, you can go to work at once in building the new vessel; but now to the skipper of the Mermaid?" and the eyes of the old buccaneer glittered viciously.

"Well, sir, as I said, he was the guest of Major White, and had to lose his arm, close to the shoulder, and soon as he is able he will return to his home."

"And his daughter?"

"She is also a guest at the major's mansion, sir."

"You saw her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is she not beautiful?"

"I thought so, sir."

"And how will they go home?"

"Captain Moncrief will take them there in his new vessel, which he calls the Sea Siren."

"Curses on him, that foils me; but where is the home of this man Hurst?"

"It is on Long Island, sir, about twenty miles from New York Bay, on the Atlantic shore, sir, as I understood it."

"And when do they sail?"

"As soon as Captain Hurst is able to go, I understood."

"Well, Basil, you have done well, and my son is ready to keep his contract with you."

"Yes, chief."

"But I am not."

The young spy started, glanced quickly at the chief, and then at his son, and he saw that the face of the latter was threatening and determined.

That he would take a stand against his father, to keep his word, Basil Brandon saw at a glance, and so he quickly quelled the rising storm by saying:

"I am thankful to Captain Bianca, chief, but I prefer to remain with the band."

"Is this so, Basil?" asked Captain Bianca.

"Yes, sir."

"Do as you deem best, but I am ready to carry out my compact if you wish it."

"No, sir, I prefer to remain."

"I am glad of your decision, Basil, for I need you."

"Now we will have supper, and then go on board and get the anchor up, for the Sea Torch sails to-night," said the old buccaneer with a grim smile upon his stern face.

CHAPTER XI.

A SURPRISE AT HURST HAVEN.

LET us return to a few days after the sea combat, described in the first chapter of this romance.

I would have my readers accompany me to Hurst Haven one pleasant evening, where are seated Captain Hurst and his beautiful daughter.

Upon the broad hearth burns a bright log fire, and through an open door a servant is visible, setting the table for tea.

The mail had arrived that afternoon, and a rare occurrence in those days, Captain Hurst and his daughter had been deeply engrossed in the reading of the papers, which were also few and far between a hundred years ago.

They had been back some little time from Charleston, and Manton Moncrief had brought them there in the Sea Siren, the beautiful vessel that had been presented to the young naval officer by the skipper-farmer.

Together the two talked over the exciting scenes through which they had passed, and Sibyl asked:

"Father, what would be done with Hugh Bronx if he was taken, think you?"

"I fear he would be hanged, my child, and it would serve him but right, though for the sake of his poor mother and sister, I hope nothing of the kind will occur," responded the skipper.

"Poor Hugh, he seemed to regard me as his especial property, and after the rescue of our vessel by Captain Moncrief, it completely changed his nature and he became revengeful and hopeful."

"He sought to make a name and thus win you, Sibyl, and so refused Moncrief's offer of a lieutenancy with him, and buying the privateer started out as a captain himself."

"He was a good mate, but I never thought he would make a good commander, and when he forced that duel upon Moncrief, and was worsted, I cannot but think that his shot, pretending to be at his first officer and second, Allen Rossmore, was intended for Moncrief."

"His flight after it, believing Moncrief dead, his refusal to surrender to an American vessel—"

of-war, got for him the brand of outlawry, and I fear he will be driven to piracy," and Captain Hurst spoke warmly, for it will be remembered that Hugh Bronx had been a mate on the Mermaid, and the farm of Bronx Hall joined Hurst Haven.

"What he can have told his mother and sister, about us, I do not know; but I shall never forget the way I was insulted when I called."

"They believed what Hugh told them, Sibyl, and some day will know him as he is, for the secret cannot remain hidden."

"You think that Hugh's having been outlawed may drive him to piracy, father?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he could be so evil as that?"

"Sibyl?"

"Yes, father."

"Do you know that I have my suspicions that the raid made upon our home, some nights ago, was by Hugh Bronx?"

"Oh, father!"

"I half believe it."

"What reason have you, sir?"

"Well, we have never been disturbed before, in our long dwelling upon the coast, and few outlaws would dare trust themselves so far inland."

"True, sir."

"Then, were they coast pirates they would have sent half a dozen parties off to rob the different wealthy farms, and not this one alone."

"It seems so, father."

"Again, I know of no one who could run into that inlet, as the wind and tide was that night, unless it was Hugh Bronx, you, myself, and possibly now Moncrief, for he has studied it well."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, the party who came were posted as to where we kept our silver plate and other valuables, and but for Moncrief's having been here that night, they would have sacked the house."

"True, father, but I did not see Hugh among the marauders."

"No, he would be too smart for that, but that they tried to kidnap you leads me to more strongly believe that Hugh Bronx was at the bottom of it."

"It may be, sir; but we shall soon know, as Captain Moncrief pursued the vessel to sea."

"Yes, the pirates little dreamed that Moncrief had run into the cove that night just after dark, and they took to flight very quickly when they made the discovery."

"But Moncrief was after them within the hour, and the Sea Siren ran down the pirate without a doubt."

"Yes, for we heard far distant firing after midnight, father; but then, if Captain Moncrief captured the pirate why did he not return?"

"That question I cannot answer, my child, but then he doubtless had some good reason for not returning immediately," said the skipper.

"Permit me to explain," said a deep voice, and a tall form, clad in the uniform of an officer in the Continental Navy entered the sitting-room from the hall, a servant having ushered him in unannounced.

CHAPTER XII. A STRANGE STORY.

"Captain Manton Moncrief!"

The words broke in delighted surprise from the lips of Sibyl Hurst, and she sprung to her feet to welcome the visitor.

"Moncrief, gladly I welcome you," cried the skipper, also rising.

The one who entered was a man among men, one who was marked as such in face, form and bearing.

He was handsome, frank and fearless faced, and looked the brave man and thorough sailor that he was from head to feet.

He was dressed in a handsome uniform, worn with the air of one accustomed to it, and his step was quick and firm as he came forward, grasping a hand of Captain Hurst and Sibyl in each one of his own.

"I reached the door as Louis was closing the blinds on the piazza, so he let me in without knocking, and I overheard my name mentioned and so spoke," he said with a smile.

"Be seated, Captain Moncrief, and let us hear all you have to tell us, and I know there is much to tell," said Sibyl, whose face was rosy-hued with pleasure.

"First, my child, tell Morgan to set out some of Captain Moncrief's favorite wine for supper, and not to forget that sailors are always hungry," said Captain Hurst.

"I acknowledge it this time at least, captain, for I would not take supper on board my vessel, hoping to reach your hospitable house before the ladder was closed for the night," said the young officer with a smile.

"Don't forget, captain, that the key of the ladder, like the latch-string of our front door, is on the outside at all hours of the day and night," the skipper said.

"I believe that, sir, from the experience I have had of your house."

"But where is your vessel, captain?" asked Sibyl, who had given a few orders to Morgan, the butler, regarding supper.

"In the cove, Miss Sibyl, for I ran her in,

though it is as dark as pitch—so dark, in fact, that I nearly lost my way several times coming up to the mansion."

"And you came alone?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not bring Lieutenant Rossmore with you?" asked the skipper.

"Or some other of your officers, for you know they are ever welcome."

"I well know that, Miss Sibyl; but the truth is, Rossmore has an important duty to perform to-night, which you shall know of anon," and both the skipper and his daughter saw a cloud pass over the face of the sailor.

But not noticing it by any remark, Sibyl said:

"You ran off in chase of the raiders so quickly the other night, that I have had no time to thank you, Captain Moncrief, for saving me from being kidnapped and the house from robbery," and Sibyl's voice quivered with feeling.

"Yes, Moncrief, you are always placing us under obligations we can never repay," said Captain Hurst.

"I am glad I was here that night—very glad," and the sailor spoke warmly.

"Did you capture the rascal?"

"Captain Hurst, I avenged you and your daughter," was the low reply.

"There is something that you wish to keep back?" urged Sibyl, who seemed to read the face of the young sailor.

"No, only what I have to tell I wish to reach no other ears than yours; and that it is to remain as a dead secret, I must beg of you."

"Certainly."

And Captain Hurst arose, strode into the adjoining room, gave a few orders to the butler, and returning, closed the door between.

"Now speak low, and no one can hear other than Sibyl and myself," he said.

"Well, my friends, I must confess to playing a double part, for where good can come of it by so doing, and only harm did I do otherwise, my conscience shall not disturb me greatly for what I do."

"May I ask if you knew any of the raiders whom you saw here the other night?"

"Not one," said both father and daughter.

"And do you know their motive?"

"To kidnap me."

"To rob the mansion."

"True, both were the motives, but the robbery was a bait for accomplishing the worse crime of kidnapping you, Miss Sibyl."

"The fact is, when I reached my vessel in the cove, I found that the marauders had run in in a large schooner, anchored just inside the inlet, and landed their party of raiders."

"When their men had to fly, they slipped their cable, for they were told that my schooner was in the cove, and put out to sea with all dispatch."

"And you gave chase?"

"Yes, I put out after the pirates, and though they had a good start began to overhaul them."

"At a suggestion from Allen Rossmore, for we recognized the vessel, we shortened sail, so as not to catch the chase too soon, not desiring to do so within sight or hearing of the land."

"But as we drew nearer, after some hours of pursuit, the pirate opened heavily upon us, and we replied."

"The Sea Siren, bearing your *nom de guerre*, as the sailors call you, seemed to bear a charmed life, for the fire of the pirate did us little damage, while our guns told heavily upon him."

"As we drew nearer, I intended to carry the enemy by boarding, and so poured in some heavy broadsides, for I was anxious to save some necks from the noose, and let them fall under our fire."

"The result was that the schooner was fearfully cut up, and upon boarding a very feeble resistance was offered and the craft was taken."

"Hardly had I set foot upon her when the cry arose that she was sinking, and finding this to be the truth, I hastily ordered a removal of all the wounded and prisoners, and what things could be saved, and barely was this done and our boats again at the davits of the Sea Siren, when she plunged bows first into the sea, carrying with her her dead commander and his crew."

"Her commander was slain then?"

"Yes, I found him dead upon her decks."

"Did you know him?" quietly asked Sibyl, but she awaited breathlessly for the answer, as did her father.

"Yes."

"Will you tell us who he was?" came in the same low tone.

"Yes, it was Hugh Bronx."

CHAPTER XIII. RIGHTING A WRONG.

"HUGH BRONX, and dead! dead under a pirate flag!"

The words fell slowly and bitterly from the lips of Sibyl Hurst, while an expression of deep sadness rested upon the face of the farmer-skipper.

They had known him from boyhood, and the inmates of Bronx Hall and Hurst Haven had been most intimate, up to the return of the father and daughter from Charleston.

It was Hugh Bronx that had given to Sibyl the name of the Sea Siren, and he had loved her devotedly, nay idolized her in fact, and had looked upon her as his property without peradventure of doubt.

Her sisterly regard for him he had mistaken for love, and it may be, but for her meeting Manton Moncrief and others, she might have been inveigled into marrying Hugh Bronx, believing that she loved him as he wished.

But her eyes had been opened to the fact that he was not her beau ideal, and that she could never become his wife.

She saw too that his jealousy of others made him a new being, or brought out his slumbering nature as it really was, for he became vicious, sullen and revengeful.

He tried to make a hero of himself in her eyes, and place Manton Moncrief under deep obligations to him, by rescuing him from the British brig, and failed, being taken prisoner himself and rescued by the very man he had sought to make his debtor.

He had tried to purchase the brig, Mermaid, of Captain Hurst, and that gentleman preferring to give the vessel to Moncrief, which he did, after she was altered into a schooner, Hugh Bronx was deeply incensed, and buying the schooner-of-war from the young naval officer at half her value, had gone privateering.

His cruise was unsuccessful, for he was saved from capture, or destruction, by Captain Moncrief, who thus made him again his debtor, and he was run into port by Bianca, the Buccaneer, in the Sea Torch.

So enraged was he against his rival, that he had picked a quarrel with him, well knowing his wonderful powers as a swordsman, and to his amazement Moncrief had disarmed him and given him his life.

His quarrel with Allen Rossmore, formerly a seaman on the Mermaid, and then his first officer and his second in the duel, and his pretending to shoot him for mutiny, but missing him and wounding Moncrief, was his next act to rid himself of his rival, and his flight followed, believing that he had killed him.

His pursuit by the brig-of-war and escape, his being outlawed, his visit to his home and the telling of his own story to his mother and sister, who had been forced by him to cast the Hursts out of their hearts utterly, followed.

But there came an order—a special one—to Manton Moncrief, as soon as he recovered from his wound, to hunt Hugh Bronx down and hang him at the yard-arm.

Thus it was that Captain Moncrief had pursued the marauders upon Hurst Haven that night, and finding who it was as he gained on his chase, had sought to kill Hugh Bronx upon his deck, rather than capture and hang him.

He was the more urged to this by Allen Rossmore, who had become the first luff of the Sea Siren, and who begged it for the sake of Mrs. Bronx and Bessie, the mother and sister of the fugitive privateersman.

Such were the thoughts that passed through the minds of the father and daughter, when they learned that Hugh Bronx had been slain.

In answer to her words, that the fugitive privateersman had died under a pirate flag, Captain Moncrief said:

"No; he still stuck to the American colors, and his vessel went down with them flying."

"The fact is, Miss Sibyl and Captain Hurst, there is more to tell about this sad affair."

"More to tell, Captain Moncrief?" asked Sibyl in surprise.

"Yes, and I will soon tell you the secret which you are to keep, and of which I spoke."

"Yes, I remember."

"It seems that Bronx had captured a valuable prize—a large vessel loaded with supplies for the English forces in America, and the fleet."

"This he put a prize crew on board of, and sent her to New York to the admiral-in-chief."

"This was in his favor, showing that though a fugitive, he was yet loyal."

"When we sunk his vessel, and saw that he was dead, and many of his crew were slain, while, with a paucity of numbers in the first place, he had sent off the prize crew referred to, Rossmore and myself had a long talk over the matter, and we came to a decision that caused me to head at once for New York."

"It seems that when I was in the cove, visiting you some time ago, that Rossmore was out in his boat, trying to learn the inlet channel, when he saw a skiff put out from the Bronx landing."

"It contained Miss Bessie Bronx, as he surmised, and in spite of the rough waters and hard winds, to his surprise he saw her run through the inlet out to sea."

"She had not seen Rossmore, and landing, he climbed the sand dunes, to discover the Fugitive Privateer lying off-shore, but in such a position that she could not be seen from Hurst Haven here, or from my lookout on the Sea Siren."

"A half gale was blowing, and a storm was rising, and Rossmore felt most anxious for the maiden, wondering if she intended to put ashore again, for it seemed so, as the schooner still remained lying to."

"He was about to come up and report the

matter to me, for I was up here with you, when he saw the surf-skiff push off from the schooner in the very face of the storm.

"The schooner at once got under way, and went flying down the coast out of sight.

"Lieutenant Rossmore seemed to feel that the maiden was rushing to her death, so he ran to the sandy shore of the inlet, divested himself of his outer clothing and waited.

"As he had expected, the daring girl headed directly into the wild waters of the inlet, and Rossmore saw that her boat was hurled keel up.

"He was already, however, in the waves and swimming toward her."

"Brave fellow," cried Sibyl.

"Noble, daring Rossmore," the skipper said.

"He is all that you say, and I rejoice that I secured so gallant an officer.

"But it was a surprise to Miss Bronx, when she gave herself up as lost, to find suddenly at her side a bold rescuer.

"He is a superb swimmer, cool, and with a nerve that cannot be shaken, and he encouraged her to aid herself, and they reached the shore in safety, when Rossmore carried her across to her landing in his boat.

"That evening he called, and it seems that the pretty girl made a deep impression upon him, for he at once took the thought of saving her brother, for he saw that the mother and sister felt that Hugh Bronx had done no wrong.

"What he had told them they believed, and to feel that he was hunted as a pirate, Rossmore saw would be a death-blow to them.

"So it was that we sought to kill Bronx, and not have to hang him, and going to the admiral with our story, Rossmore pleading earnestly, and with the fact that the Fugitive Privateersman had sent in the British supply prize, it was agreed to right the wrong for the sake of his mother and sister."

"I cannot see how," said Sibyl.

"Well, it was agreed to report that Captain Hugh Bronx had captured and sent in a most valuable prize, weakening his crew greatly in so doing, and that he had been attacked by an enemy—for such I was—and sunk, his colors flying to the last."

"This leaves the impression that the enemy was a British vessel."

"Yes, Miss Sibyl."

"This certainly whitewashes his evil deeds," said Captain Hurst.

"Yes; but he has been guilty of no act of piracy, and I was the one he sought to kill, and to whom he gave an order for ten thousand dollars for my vessel, on his agents in New York, and then collected it himself.

"He refused to come to in his flight from Charleston, and fitted his vessel out in New York as mine, saying nothing about the sale, and these were his crimes against the Government."

"Seeing him dead, I forgave all injury he had done me, and his sending in the supply ship gained him the pardon of the admiral, while Rossmore's pleading for the mother and sister, righted the wrong as I have told you, and with this secret kept by us, he need not go down to his grave blackened with infamy, and leaving a heart-broken mother and sister to mourn him."

"Manton Moncrief, you are the noble man I felt you to be, and I thank you for this," and Sibyl arose and held out her hand, which the captain warmly grasped.

"Yes, yours is a forgiving nature, Moncrief, for you have had much to forgive," the skipper said.

"It is very kind for you both to say so, but no good could come, on y evil, had I done otherwise, and I feel deeply for the poor mother and sister, for Allen Rossmore has gone there tonight to break the news of the unfortunate man's death to them."

"Poor Mrs. Bronx! poor Bessie! But how much better as it is than were the truth told them," murmured Sibyl, just as the door opened and supper was announced.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALLEN ROSSMORE'S ROMANCE.

WHEN Captain Manton Moncrief landed from his vessel, the Sea Siren, which he had run through the inlet into the timber-sheltered cove not very far from Hurst Haven mansion, another person was with him.

That other was his first lieutenant, Allen Rossmore, and while the captain wended his way as the reader has seen, to Hurst Haven, his luff went on his way toward Bronx Hall, situated back beyond the meadows on the hill.

A light guided his steps, but, having been there once before, he knew the way, even had it not been for the ruddy glow shining out of the sitting-room window.

In that room sat two persons, a handsome lady of forty-five and a young girl of eighteen.

The former was engaged in knitting a scarf, while the latter held a book in her hand, though she did not appear to be reading, for her eyes were gazing upon vacancy.

"Bessie, I am thinking of poor Hugh, and how sorry I am that he went as a privateer captain, for I hardly think he was fitted to such a position of danger and responsibility," said Mrs. Bronx, looking up from her work.

"I was thinking also of brother, mother, and I am, with you, sorry that he has done what he has; but when he returns we will urge him to give it up and remain with us, for the farm needs his care," answered Bessie.

"I fear he will never do it," sighed the mother.

"I regret deeply this ill-feeling between us and the Hursts, mother, and I shall tell Hugh that I owe my life to the lieutenant of the Sea Siren, Allen Rossmore, who you remember was brother's first officer, and his second in that duel, and mutinied.

"Of course I did not tell Lieutenant Rossmore that I knew aught of the affair, but I hope, after having saved my life, Hugh will not feel unkindly toward him."

"I hope not, my child, for Lieutenant Rossmore impressed me as a very fine young man, and I owe him my life-long gratitude that he saved you from death—Ah! there is a step on the piazza, and it may be your brother."

Bessie uttered a glad cry and ran to the door, throwing it open ere the sound of the heavy knocker had ceased to vibrate.

Seeing a form in uniform, she very nearly threw herself into the arms of the visitor, when his voice checked her just in time, as he said:

"Good-evening, Miss Bronx."

"Lieutenant Rossmore!" she exclaimed, with surprise, and her face turned crimson, while she added:

"I mistook you for my brother; but you are very welcome, sir; come right into the sitting-room, for mother is there."

She grasped his hand warmly, and led him into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Bronx gave him a hearty welcome, adding:

"This is a pleasure we had not anticipated so soon, at least after your last visit."

"I just came from my vessel, which is in the cove, having run in after dark," said the young sailor.

There was something about the manner of Rossmore that was unlike himself, as he had appeared to Mrs. Bronx and Bessie before, and both noticed it.

Bessie at once felt that he was the bearer of evil tidings, and said quickly:

"Lieutenant Rossmore, I feel that you have something to tell us—the Sea Siren was in the cove the other night, when my brother's schooner ran in, and—"

She paused, for he asked in a surprised way:

"You know that your brother's vessel came in?"

"Yes, for I did not wish him to meet Captain Moncrief, and I arranged with him to display a signal if the Sea Siren was not in the cove.

"But she must have come in just ahead of my brother's schooner, and I believing that the inlet was clear displayed my signal."

"Was not that the night of the pirates' attack upon Hurst Haven?" asked Mrs. Bronx.

"Yes, mother."

"Then your brother must have followed them to sea at once."

"Yes, mother," faintly said Bessie.

"Yes, madam, Captain Bronx at once put to sea, and it is of your son that I have come to tell you."

Rossmore spoke with deep feeling, and Bessie moaned:

"Oh Heaven have mercy! what is there to tell?"

"Yes, is my son wounded, or killed?" cried the mother, clasping her hands and turning deathly pale.

"My dear Mrs. Bronx, in these days of war we cannot but live in dread of losing those dearest to us, who are battling for their country, and my deepest sympathy goes out to you and Miss Bronx, that you have to mourn your son as dead."

"Dead! only dead!" gasped Bessie, gazing at him with her eyes full of tears.

"My boy dead?" moaned the mother, and her head was buried in her hands and rested upon the table by her side.

"He was coming to visit you doubtless, as you have said, Miss Bronx, but was prevented from doing so by that piratical attack upon Hurst Haven, when he put to sea to meet a deadly, dangerous enemy."

"A British cruiser?" groaned Mrs. Bronx, while Bessie sat, white and tearless eyed and calm, gazing at the young sailor.

"He met the enemy, madam, and one far stronger, and in the combat that followed his vessel was sunk, after Captain Bronx had been slain upon his quarter-deck, and the schooner went down with her flag still flying."

"Thank God that he died like a man," cried the brave woman.

"How know you this, Lieutenant Rossmore?" asked Bessie in a voice that was hardly audible.

"The Sea Siren was near, Miss Bronx, in fact took part in the action, and we saw all, and sailing for New York made our report to the admiral."

"From him we learned that Captain Bronx sent into port, shortly before, a very valuable supply ship, captured from the British."

"And his vessel went down?"

"Yes, Mrs. Bronx."

"And you are sure he was dead?"

"Some of the crew, which we managed to pick up in boats, reported that he fell dead upon his deck before the enemy boarded; his officers were also slain, and that may be the reason why the schooner did not strike her flag and surrender before she was carried by boarding."

"My poor, poor boy! But he has died a noble death, and has fallen in defense of his country."

"A bitter, fearful blow it is to bear; but mothers all over our land, Lieutenant Rossmore, are mourning their dead soldier and sailor boys, and I must not yield to my sorrow, but be brave and strong."

"Excuse me, and I will see that supper is ordered for you."

Rossmore would have protested, but a sign from Bessie caused him to simply bow, for he saw that the poor mother wished to be alone with her grief, while the maiden had something to say to him.

This he would have liked to avoid, for he dreaded her questioning, as he had seen that she was eager to know all.

As soon as Mrs. Bronx had left the room, Bessie crossed over to Allen Rossmore, and said earnestly:

"Will you answer me a few questions, Lieutenant Rossmore?"

"Anything I can, Miss Bronx."

"From you I learned, when we met before, the story of all that had occurred on the brig Mermaid and what followed in Charleston."

"Yes."

"I had heard my poor brother's story, and somehow it did not all seem real, and I so questioned you that I found that Hugh had not told us the whole truth—that he had hidden some things."

"I kept this from my mother, but I could not but think all the time, and I came to the conclusion that my unfortunate brother's jealousy had caused the break between the Hursts and ourselves, and caused him to act toward a rival, who had greatly befriended him, as he should not have done."

"He was certainly very jealous of Captain Moncrief," said Rossmore.

"I can understand now how Sibyl regarded him; but, taking his side of the story, I naturally sided with him, and both mother and myself treated Miss Hurst as though she were a bitter foe."

"But I wish now the truth from you."

"In what respect, Miss Bronx?"

"The night my brother's schooner came into the inlet, I set the signal that the Sea Siren was not there, for I knew not of her having run in soon after dark."

"Yes."

"I heard the firing at Hurst Haven, and with my night-glass I stood on the piazza, watching the inlet."

"Well?"

"It was said that pirates attacked Hurst Haven?"

"So they did, Miss Bronx."

"And sought not only to rob the place, but also to kidnap Miss Hurst."

"Such was the case."

"What motive had they for kidnapping Sibyl, and how did they know of her, and of the wealth in Hurst Haven?" and he voice of Bessie Bronx sunk to a whisper as she asked the question.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR OTHERS' SAKE.

ALLEN ROSSMORE seemed slightly taken aback by the direct question put to him by Bessie Bronx.

But he had made up his mind as to what he was to do and say, his romance had been mapped out, and he determined to go on as he had begun.

"Well Miss Bronx," he said, "it is generally known along the coast that Captain Hurst is a very rich man, and has quantities of silver plate in his mansion."

"Then there are wicked men who felt that by kidnapping Miss Hurst they could get a large ransom for her return, as indeed they could, so the coast pirates, which invite the approaches to New York, both off Montauk and Sandy Hook, doubtless ran in with their vessel, and—"

"Who was their pilot into the inlet?"

"That I cannot tell you, Miss Bronx."

"As to those who can run a vessel in that inlet by night, I can count them on one hand, I may say, for they are Skipper Hurst, Sibyl, who is the best pilot on the coast, my poor dead brother, and some one on board the Sea Siren, for I notice that she runs in at all times and in all weather."

"Captain Moncrief pilots her, while I have also learned the channel."

"Well, I know of no one else, so who could have brought the pirate craft in?"

"I could not tell, I am sure; but there must be some one else who knows the channel, that you do not recall."

"No, I do not know of any one else, but there is one thing more!"

"Yes, miss."

"I told you that I watched the inlet with my glass."

"Yes."
 "I saw but two vessels go out of the inlet."
 "But two?" echoed Rossmore.
 "Yes."
 "The pirate and the schooner of your brother?"
 "No."
 "He went to sea with the pirate."
 "Did he?"
 "Yes, miss."
 "And you followed?"
 "Yes."
 "About three-quarters of an hour after?"
 "Yes, within an hour."
 "Captain Moncrief was at the Hurst mansion?"
 "Yes."
 "And beat off the pirates?"
 "He did."
 "Then he went to his vessel and gave chase."
 "Yes, Miss Bronx."
 "The schooner of my brother was already far out at sea?"
 "Yes, barely visible."
 "And the pirate?"
 "We did not see the pirate vessel, and, as your brother was in pursuit we naturally left the chase for him."
 "But there were but two vessels, my brother's schooner, and the Sea Siren, that left the inlet, sir."
 This was a stunner for Rossmore; but he rallied quickly and replied:
 "Then that carries out my idea, that the pirates landed in their boats, escaped that way, and once out of the inlet boarded their vessel, which put to flight."
 Bessie Bronx gave a sigh of relief, and grasping the hand of the young sailor said earnestly:
 "Oh, Lieutenant Rossmore! you do not know what a heavy, fearful weight you have taken from my heart, for I confess to you frankly that I feared it was not after all a robbery of Hurst Haven that was intended, but the kidnapping of Sibyl, and, may Heaven forgive the thought against my poor dead brother, but I dreaded that he meant to force Sibyl to marry him."
 "I am more than glad that I can disabuse your mind, Miss Bronx, and—"
 "And I feared that the Sea Siren had followed my brother and sunk his vessel, while your kindness of heart had decided that it should remain as a buried secret."
 Rossmore could not but give Bessie credit for wonderful powers of perception; but he said:
 "My dear Miss Bronx, if you had heard Captain Moncrief, and the admiral speak of the service your brother had rendered, in capturing the supply ship, and knew how gallant a thing it is for a man to die on his own deck, and let his vessel go down with her colors flying, you could not but feel that your sorrow was mitigated, and I beg that you will let every doubt leave your heart."
 "I will, I will, and Heaven bless my poor brother."
 "And Miss Hurst, Captain Moncrief is anxious to visit you and your mother, to express his sympathy, while I feel, if the jealous love of your brother did temporarily raise a barrier between Captain Hurst and his daughter, and sever a friendship that was most sincere, that they would be more than glad to come to you in your sorrow with kind words of sympathy."
 "After the way that mother and myself treated Sibyl?"
 "Ah, yes, for she felt that you were laboring under a false impression."
 "I told mother that you had given me a different idea of poor Hugh's story, and we felt that his jealous nature had caused him to perhaps see things in a different light from what was intended."
 "I am glad of this, for I feel that you and your mother have no truer friends than are Captain Hurst and his daughter, while I hope sincerely, Miss Bronx, that you will consider me as—as—that is let me, as far as I can, take the part of your brother, and command me in all that I can do to serve you."
 "As frankly as you offer your friendship, so frankly I accept it," and she held forth her hand.
 Then Rossmore would have departed, but she would not hear of it and said:
 "Remember, you leave us all alone with our grief, so remain to supper with us, and afterward we will talk of poor Hugh, and what is best for the future, for you know both mother and myself wish to ask your advice."
 Thus urged Rossmore remained, and soon after they were called in to supper by the servant.
 Mrs. Bronx was there to welcome the guest, calm, sad-faced, but thoroughly herself, and she said earnestly:
 "I am so glad that you remained, Lieutenant Rossmore, and you must remember, whenever your vessel puts into the inlet you must consider this your home."
 Mrs. Bronx contented herself with a cup of tea. Bessie forced herself to eat a few mouthfuls, while Rossmore, in spite of the tempting supper was unable to get up his usual good appetite.
 After the meal Mrs. Bronx asked him to tell all that he knew of her son, and all that he said

shielded the privateersman all he could, but what the mother gleaned was that both Sibyl Hurst and her father had been misunderstood by Hugh.

When at last Rossmore arose, declining the pressing invitation of Mrs. Bronx to remain for the night, he left an impression that was most flattering to him.

Once he was on his way, walking slowly back to his vessel, and he muttered:

"Well, I feel that I have but done right, for how much more bitter would be the blow did they know the truth."

"Ah yes, it was better for Hugh Bronx that his career ended as it did."

CHAPTER XVI.

A PRISONER.

THE path which Rossmore took from Bronx Hall to the inlet shore, led across the highway, upon which the mansion was situated, through a pasture, dotted with cedars, and over a bit of meadow land to the cove.

The inlet was a break in the outer beach, and the sea pouring in and out with the tide, formed a lake-like sheet of water a league in length, and from an eighth to a quarter of a mile in width.

The inlet was at the upper end of this body of water, and toward the other end there was a cove, and heavy woodland, upon the main shore, where several vessels could lie at anchor completely hidden, and a craft sailing leisurely by would never suspect that there was a hiding-place there.

The outer shore of the basin was about four hundred feet wide, covered in places by dwarf cedars, and with sand dunes rising along the sea, in some places twenty feet high.

In the timber-sheltered cove was the anchorage of Hurst Haven, and there was a boat-house, and several small pleasure craft at anchor.

Further down was the meadow-land shore of Bronx Hall Farm, and here also was a boat-house, with boats and a small yacht lying near.

The fence dividing the two estates of the Bronx and Hurst Families, ran a couple of hundred yards from the boat-house of Bronx Hall.*

To reach his vessel, anchored in the Hurst Haven Cove, Rossmore wended his way down the path to the Bronx Hall boat-house, and from there along the sandy beach until he came opposite to the Sea Siren at her anchorage.

Reaching the boat-house, Rossmore paused a moment and glanced out over the waters.

He had keen eyes and he discovered a dark object in the basin, moving toward the place where he stood.

"It is a boat, and its occupant is standing up and sculling with one oar."

So he said, and standing in the shadow of the boat-house he waited.

Who it could be he had no means of knowing, but aware of how quiet all had been in and about the inlet, since he had known it, he felt that there was something suspicious in the solitary occupant of the boat coming across the waters close on to midnight.

"It may be a fisherman from Bronx Hall; but then why would he fish at night?" muttered the officer, and seating himself upon a bench in the boat-house he awaited the coming of the boat.

In a short while the boat touched the pier and the occupant sprung out.

Then his first act was to make fast the painter to the dock, after which he stood in an undecided way, his face turned toward Bronx Hall.

A loud he said, little dreaming that any one heard his voice:

"I am weak and wretched, but I must sink this boat in some way, or it will tell the story."

"Then I must hasten to the Hall, for a light yet burns in Bessie's room."

"I will fill the boat with these old pieces of iron ballast, tow it out with a skiff, take the plug out and let it go down to the bottom; but oh! how weak I am."

He came toward the shore end of the boat-house, for the rowboats were drawn up upon the beach, and suddenly uttered a cry as a form confronted him and a stern voice said:

"Hugh Bronx, you are my prisoner!"

"God have mercy upon me!" groaned the Fugitive Privateersman, and he sunk down upon the bench from which Rossmore had just arisen.

"I thought you were dead, Hugh Bronx, and so reported to your mother and sister this night."

"You are Rossmore?"

"I am."

"I know you now."

"You should know the man who befriended you, as your officer, your friend and your second, and was accused by you of mutiny because I did not uphold your dastard acts."

"I am in your power, for I am unarmed, weak, starving and wretched."

"I am not the one to strike a man when he is down."

*The inlet referred to above is at Far Rockaway, L. I., and the ocean. In the past hundred years has changed the nature of the shore a dozen times though to-day it is much like it was a century ago, excepting the heavy timber and the cove.—THE AUTHOR.

"But how is it I find you here when nearly a week ago we sunk your vessel and I saw you lying, wounded it now seems, though we all then believed dead, upon your own deck?"

"I was not seriously wounded, but stunned, I may say, and came to consciousness as my schooner was going down."

"I ran to a boat that was loose upon the deck, sprung into it, and though nearly swamped, was saved."

"I threw the water out, as best I could with my cap, found I had one oar, and in the locker was a basket of lunch, left there some days before, when I was out fishing."

"I headed shoreward, the tide being with me, and reached Oak Island by dawn."

"From there I made my way here by night, to find that all has been for naught, for the end has come at last."

"What end do you anticipate?"

"I know that I am outlawed, and that I will be hanged."

"Have you been guilty of any act of piracy toward American vessels?"

"Before Heaven, no!"

"And more, have you hoisted any other flag above your deck?"

"No, but I have captured several prizes and sent them in, one a most valuable supply ship."

"And you also landed a force to rob Hurst Haven."

"I was driven to that by my men, who mutinied for gold."

"But your men were not responsible for your attempting to kidnap Miss Hurst?"

The man started and said nothing.

"Captain Bronx, will you let me talk plainly to you, for, for the sake of your mother and sister I wish to serve you?"

"Be my friend, Rossmore, and I will do just as you say."

"Why is it that you hate Captain Moncrief as you do?"

"Because he has stolen from me the woman I meant to marry," was the fierce rejoinder.

"Bronx, Captain Moncrief saved the Mermaid from capture by the Sea Torch, saved Captain Hurst from being hanged by the buccanier, along with you, me, and the rest of the crew of the brig."

"He recaptured you from the British, sold you his schooner for half its value, on a New York order on your agents, which you drew before he arrived to get the money, and he spared your life in your duel with him."

"He saved Miss Hurst from captivity by the pirate, sent his surgeon to nurse Captain Hurst back to life, and for all this you hate him because he won the love of Miss Hurst."

"It is natural that he should do so, splendid, handsome, daring man that he is, and you had not asked her to marry you."

"You tried to blacken him as a traitor, when he saved your cruiser from destruction, you insulted him, cheated him out of his money, and, when he spared you in your duel, you picked a quarrel with me for one purpose, to make me appear as a mutineer, for you knew I would not obey your impudent commands, and, pretending to fire at me, shot Captain Moncrief, and very nearly killed him."

"You fled, were pursued by an American cruiser, refused to obey orders, fitted your vessel out in New York, by pretending to be Moncrief's lieutenant, and as such was branded as an outlaw."

"Moncrief had orders to hunt you down and hang you, and yet he spared you, when on his way North, with Captain Hurst and his daughter on board, bringing them home, he chased you, but finding, as he overhauled you, who you were, he put off and spared you."

"When you attempted to kidnap Miss Hurst the other night, and your crew found him at the mansion, his vessel in the cove, he became revengeful, pursued you, fired on you, and in mercy sought to kill you by his fire, that he might not have to hang you, as were his orders."

"Doing this, as he believed you dead, he sailed for New York, and with myself urged the admiral to let the outlaw brand, which had not been issued, except to him, be withdrawn against you, and allow it to be reported that you were killed in action by an enemy, leaving all to suppose that the enemy was a British vessel."

"It was also given out that you had sent valuable prizes in, and you got the credit of dying as a brave man on your own deck, your vessel going down with her colors flying."

"Thank God!" groaned the Fugitive Privateersman, burying his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XVII.

ROSSMORE'S DEMAND.

FOR some moments no word was spoken between the two, and then Hugh Bronx started up with the cry:

"Then I am pardoned, and once more a free man?"

"No, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"You were pardoned as a dead man, and a lie covered your evil deeds."

"And as I am?"

"You are still an outlaw."

"This cannot be."

"It will be, for the admiral condoned your crimes as dead, for the sake of your mother and sister; but, living, he would arrest you; yes, and have you hanged."

"Great God!"

"I speak but the truth."

"Can it be possible?"

"It certainly is."

"I will risk it."

"Do so if you desire."

"I will go to Bronx Hall, explain how I escaped, and all will be well."

"Until to-morrow."

"Well?"

"You will be arrested."

"By whom?"

"Captain Moncrief."

"Bah!"

"Sneer if you like, but he has orders to capture and hang you."

"He would not dare."

"He would, for he forgave your acts against him, and your attempting to kidnap Miss Hurst, believing you dead; but alive he will carry out his orders."

"He sunk my vessel."

"In mercy, yes, that he might not have to hang you."

"I will risk it."

"There is one on your vessel, Captain Bronx, who will swear that the wound you received was by your own hand; that you attempted suicide when all was lost, but failed."

"Who says this?" was the hardly audible query.

"It is said by one who knows, and I tell you frankly, Bronx, that what was smothered over by falsehoods, for you as dead, will not be allowed if you are found alive."

"I cannot believe it."

"My dear sir, this very night Captain Moncrief went up to Hurst Haven and told the story as we had agreed upon."

"He is there now, curse him, for I see lights there."

"Doubtless."

"And let me tell you," resumed Rossmore, "that the day your brave sister went out to warn you of the presence in this inlet of the Sea Siren, you sailed away and left her to return in the face of a storm."

"Fortunately I was over yonder studying the channel, saw her boat dashed over, and saved her from death."

"I thank you for this from my inmost heart, Rossmore, and it cancels all ill-feeling I have ever felt for you."

"I care not for that, Bronx, but I called to see how she was and met your mother."

"Not a word against you did I breathe, as to the real truth, and Captain Hurst and his daughter have also kept secret your Charleston acts."

"To-night I went to see your mother and sister."

"I told them of your vessel having been sunk by an enemy, your dying on your own deck, and I made you a hero, believing you dead."

"I never lied so in my life, as you can understand, and I left them believing you a true man, and one who had nobly died for his country."

"I left them half an hour ago to find you alive after all, and if you insist upon going home and putting to the test what I tell you will be the result, I have but one duty now to perform."

"And what is that?"

"To arrest you and carry you on board the Sea Siren."

The hand of the Fugitive Privateersman flew to his breast, and, although he had said that he was unarmed, he drew forth a knife with a long slender blade, and sprung upon the young officer while he cried:

"Never! I will kill you first!"

Fortunately for Rossmore he was not unprepared for just such an act, and he caught the knife-hand with a grip of iron, while he dashed his left fist full in the face of his assailant.

The blow was a stunning one, and the knife dropped to the floor of the boat-house, where it stuck quivering in the plank.

Seizing it, as Hugh Bronx staggered back, Rossmore thrust it into his belt and said:

"You are weak and worn down, Bronx, and no match for me, so do not make a fool of yourself again."

Hugh Bronx staggered back to the seat, dropped upon it and groaned in agony of spirit.

"Be reasonable, Bronx, for I act for your good," said Rossmore, quietly.

"What do you wish?"

"To the world you are dead, and your mother and sister so believe you."

"Well?"

"If you return home you would be arrested, tried and hanged, if I did not carry you a prisoner on board the Sea Siren to-night."

"Go on."

"Have you any money?"

"A couple of hundred dollars."

"Well, I have a thousand on board the Sea Siren, which I will lend you."

"What for?"

"With such a sum you can go to another land and seek your fortune."

"I do not care to."

"Then go elsewhere in this country, and, under an assumed name, enlist as a soldier and win fame."

"When you have done this, when the war is over, you can return home quietly and live without molestation, telling what story you please about your escape from your vessel."

"This is what you suggest that I shall do?"

"No, I demand it."

"Demand?"

"Yes."

"You have no right to do so."

"I will either demand that you do so, or I will arrest you as a pirate and carry you on board the Sea Siren, and your life will end very speedily then, I assure you."

"You force me to consent to your demand."

"You do so?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will sink your boat for you, and then aid you into the little loft over this boat-house, where you can remain until to-morrow night."

"And then?"

"I will have the schooner at an early hour in the morning, pretending to go on a day's fishing, so will have a large lunch prepared for me, while I will also smuggle in some other things you may need."

"To-morrow night I will help you to set sail, on yonder little sail-boat."

"The tide will be running out until near midnight, and you can go out of the inlet and head for New York, while, slipping the cable, as you will, it will appear that the sail-boat got loose and drifted out to sea."

"You can reach New York the following day some time, and with money, sail from there wherever you choose."

"This is a good plan."

"I think so."

"And I am still to remain as dead?"

"Yes."

"Forever?"

"It is open for any man to make a name for himself in this war."

"Once you have done that you can return home in honor."

"If I refuse?"

"You know what awaits you."

"You drive me to this?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"For the sake of your name as it now stands, for the sake of your poor mother and sister who believe you died a brave sailor's death, and mourn you as a martyr to the cause of American freedom."

"You will insist that I can get no pardon?"

"I know it."

"How do you?"

"Captain Moncrief's patience has ceased to be a virtue, and he would hang you at sight, I am sure; so that there would be no doubt of your being dead, though I feel he would never let the public know it, for the sake of your mother and sister."

"Then I am doomed to obey you?"

"I think you should congratulate yourself that you fell into my hands rather than in those who would have been merciless."

"And why do you spare me?"

For a moment Rossmore made no reply, and then he said, with deep feeling:

"Because I love your sister, Hugh Bronx, and have done so since I snatched her from the waves some time ago."

"Hail do you, an ordinary seaman, aspire to my sister's hand?"

"Hugh Bronx, I have aspirations—yes; but whether I can win her love I know not; but it ill becomes you to speak of my being an ordinary seaman, for you were simply a mate on the Mermaid, where I was boatswain."

"You are rich, and your father was a sea-captain."

"I am poor—began as cabin boy on a coaster, to support my mother after the death of my father; but he was an English naval officer, and a gentleman."

"To-day, you are in reality a pirate, a fugitive from justice, and I am a lieutenant in the American Navy, with no act of dishonor laid at my door; while I have a snug little sum saved up, with prospects of plenty of prize-money under the gallant Moncrief, for you know what he is."

"Now, Hugh Bronx, where is the comparison between us that does not reflect odium upon you?"

"I have nothing against you, Rossmore, and I will do as you say."

"You are wise."

"Now let me sink your boat to hide it, and then aid you into the boat-house loft."

This was done, and with some old sails stowed up there, Hugh Bronx was made quite comfortable.

Then Rossmore took his leave, walking rapidly around the sandy beach to his schooner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROKEN FAITH.

HARDLY had Rossmore disappeared from the boat-house, when Hugh Bronx quietly slipped down from the loft.

He stood for awhile watching, as though he feared that he might be observed, and then he muttered as he turned his gaze upon his home:

"The light still burns, so she has not retired yet."

As though assured that he was not watched by the naval officer, he then left the boat-house and walked briskly along toward the mansion.

Having made up his mind to some course, he crossed the highway, entered the gateway, and walked around to the side of the house, where a light burned in an upper window.

The curtain was down, but the bright light shining through showed that the occupant of the room had certainly not retired leaving it burning as it was.

He knew it to be his sister's room, and picking up a small pebble he stood in the shadow of a cedar and threw it up against the glass.

He saw a form darken the curtain which was then drawn aside and Bessie Bronx stood revealed.

Again he threw a pebble, and then the face was pressed against the pane of glass, the hands sheltered it and the eyes sought to penetrate the darkness without.

Observing, when her eyes could see objects outside, a dark form standing by the cedar, she felt sure that Rossmore had returned for some reason, and she quietly raised the window, not caring to arouse her mother whom she had heard pacing her room until a half-hour before, unable to sleep with her deep sorrow upon her.

Then Mrs. Bronx had become quiet, and Bessie seemed to feel that, utterly worn out she had dropped to sleep.

Raising the window as softly as it was possible to do, Bessie looked out and from below came in a loud whisper:

"Do not be frightened, Bessie, for I am not dead, as was supposed. I am Hugh."

It is well that Bessie had taken the precaution to make the heavy window fast, or she would have let it fall with crushing weight upon her.

As it was she felt her knees give way, and she dropped down upon the sill, her head drooping down upon her hands.

"Bessie! Sister! for God's sake do not faint."

"Rouse yourself, for I am no ghost, but your brother Hugh in the flesh," cried the man.

With a mighty effort at self-control, Bessie aroused herself and called back:

"I will come down, Hugh; go to the side door."

She closed the window, put out her lamp and descended the stairs without making a sound.

Drawing back the bolt she opened the door at the side of the house, and which led from a small piazza into the dining-room.

She had already lighted the lamp, and closed the doors behind her to prevent any sound from being heard, for she did not wish to arouse her mother, and let her suddenly discover the cause, as the shock might be a fearful one.

"Oh Hugh!" and Bessie started as she beheld the haggard face, the beard of a week's growth, unkempt hair, a handkerchief that was blood-stained about the head, and a uniform that was anything but attractive.

"Oh Hugh! thank God you are alive!" she cried, throwing her arms about his neck and drawing him into the room.

"It would be better if I was dead," he said, bitterly, and then added:

"But I am famished, starving, so give me food, for God's sake."

She sprung to the pantry and hastily set before him cold meats, bread and wine, and he ate with a ravenous appetite, while she watched him eagerly.

"Now, how can I break the news to mother and not shock her, for she has sunk to sleep believing you dead, Hugh?"

"She must not know, Bessie."

"Mother must not know you are alive?" she asked, with intense surprise.

"No; no one must know."

"Why Hugh?"

"I mean it."

"But why?"

"Well, I am supposed to be dead, so let it be so believed, for I died in honor, it is said."

"Yes, brother, Lieutenant Rossmore told us how you fought for your vessel to the end, and that she sank with her colors flying, and you, with the dead about you on your deck, went down with her."

"A brave picture, Bess, but not altogether true, for I did not sink, as you see. I managed to get into a boat, when I recovered from a stunning wound I had received, and was thus saved."

"After long days, steering and working my boat with one oar, I reached here to-night."

"And most glad am I to see you, dear Hugh; but you do not seem like yourself, and I cannot understand why you do not let me break the news of your arrival to mother."

"It must not be known to any one but you, Bessie."

"Not known?"

"So I said."

"But why?"

"Did you see Rossmore, to-night?"

"I told you that I did."

"He deceived you."

"What can you mean, brother?"

"He sought to save you and mother from grief, and so told you the story of my vessel's being sunk by an enemy."

"He led you to believe that it was a British cruiser."

"Oh, Hugh!"

"When the enemy was Moncrief, in the Sea Siren."

"Hugh!"

"Oh, I am telling you the truth, Bessie, and as I have to go away from home a wanderer, I might as well tell you all."

"I foolishly put to sea, after my shooting Moncrief in place of Rossmore."

"I was pursued, refused to surrender, escaped, and placed myself in the light of an outlaw."

"I had no money to fit my vessel out, but did so at the Government yard in New York, as Moncrief's cruiser, and this further told against me; while, needing gold, as my men were mutinous, I used the money I had given Moncrief an order to draw, intending to pay him at another time."

"Oh, Hugh! Hugh!" groaned Bessie.

"He had orders to catch and hang me, and I intended to serve the Government so well by taking prizes, and fighting small English cruisers, that I could run in, pay Moncrief his money, and get pardon for what I had done."

"But I was too late."

"Oh, brother, you are indeed in sore trouble!"

"I am a candidate for the hangman," was the bitter reply.

"One word."

"Well, sis?"

"Who was it that made the attack upon Hurst Haven some nights ago?"

He was silent, and Bessie said, in a quivering voice:

"Oh! my brother, were you guilty of that act, too?"

"Sis, I was desperate, for my men forced me to it, as they would have gold, and had they taken Sibyl prisoner her father would have given a large sum for her ransom."

"I meant, also, to have her believe that I rescued her from a pirate, so that she would love me again, for I meant her no harm."

"All is plain now, Hugh, and those you have called your foes have proven your best friends, for you were shielded in all your evil acts."

"Well, sis, you see just how I am situated, and I intend to begin life anew and do better."

"I hope so."

"I shall seek a distant part of the country, take the name of Broncton Hughes, thus changing my own, and as a soldier or sailor win fame or perish."

"When I have won fame I will appeal for a pardon for the past, and return home."

"Why not appeal now for pardon?"

"Because it would not be granted."

"It certainly would, I am sure."

"I know that it would not."

"Let me make the trial?"

"No; for living I would be hanged; while dead, for your sake and mother's, my acts were passed over."

"I will keep you in hiding somewhere while I try, Hugh."

"Not for the world, for if a whisper of a suspicion came that I was alive I would be hunted down and hanged."

"No; let me go my way, sis."

"But have you any money?"

"Oh, sis, I am destitute."

"What sum would you need, brother?"

"I am utterly destitute, as I said."

"I have a few hundreds—about five—laid up from my interest money."

"No, sis, I would not take your money, and besides, to do what I wish, I would need several thousand."

"So much, brother?"

"Yes, I would like a couple of thousand dollars at least, and so I will go as a vagabond."

"No, Hugh, no!"

"I can do nothing else."

"Hugh."

"Well?"

"I have some jewels, as you know, which father gave mother years ago, and she gave them to me, to wear as a bridal present, when I got married."

"Now those are in my secret closet up-stairs, and father gave for them he said, two thousand dollars."

"These, with the money, will give you an ample sum, and you must take them."

"Oh, sis, would I rob you?"

"No, Hugh, it will not be robbery."

"The money may do you, so you can keep the necklace and bracelets until you are compelled to sell them, and if not, you can bring them back when you come."

"Well, sis, I will take them as a loan, and should I have to sell them, I will bring you jewels double their value in the end."

"I am young, have had experience, and I feel, if I appear well-dressed, and a gentleman, I can get an officer's commission, either on sea or land."

"I shall have to be cautious, as you know, so

will look to the army first, and as Broncton Hughes, you will know me."

"Brother."

"Well, Bess?"

"After you are settled somewhere, or have a commission, write a letter to me, in a disguised hand, telling me of your escape, and your intention to remain away, under certain reasons you cannot explain, and wish your being alive kept secret."

"Why should I?"

"That I may break the news to poor mother, and relieve her of her sorrow for you as being dead."

"I'll do it, sis; but now I must be off, for dawn will be here, and I must be on my way."

"But can you escape, Hugh?"

"Oh, yes, I've got that fixed."

"Wait."

Leaving the room cautiously Bessie went up to her room, while her wicked brother remained in the dining-room, helping himself to more food and wine.

It seemed to him that she was gone an age, but within ten minutes she returned, and she handed to him a small leather box and a bag of gold.

"Here, Hugh, and may Heaven guard you," she said, and in her eyes were tears she could not restrain.

"You are a jewel, Bess, better than all these; but I must rob the pantry, for I shall need some food."

She quickly got him all that she could find in the pantry, not forgetting a couple of bottles of wine at his suggestion.

Then he bade her farewell, and she clung to him as though the parting was forever.

Bolting the door after him, she cleaned up the table, and going to her room glanced out into the darkness.

She saw him walking rapidly away toward the shore, and dropping upon her knees, cried fervently:

"God in Heaven, have mercy upon him!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OUTCAST.

CONGRATULATING himself upon his success at home, and caring nothing for his broken faith with Rossmore, Hugh Bronx sought once more his hiding-place in the boat-house loft.

It was but a couple of hours to dawn, and refreshed by the food he had eaten, and strengthened by the wine, he was in a humor for sleep, and sunk to rest very quickly, the sails furnishing him a very comfortable couch.

Utterly worn out, he slept for hours, and only awakened when he heard a loud knocking on the floor of the loft.

Cautiously he peeped through a crack, and recognizing Rossmore, said in a low tone:

"All right, sir."

Raising the trap, he looked down, while Rossmore said, quietly:

"You were very sound asleep, and I feared you had gone."

"You did not think I would break faith with you, did you?"

"I did not know what you would do; but here, I have brought you a lunch, and it is enough to last you several days, with a flask of brandy, some cigars, a storm-coat and hat, a blanket, and other things that will be useful."

"A brother officer asked me, as I was leaving ship, if I expected to be gone a month, so you see you have ample for your run to New York, even though you should be delayed several days longer than you anticipated."

"You are very kind, Mr. Rossmore."

"No, I merely do my duty toward one in great distress, and for the sake of those who love you."

"I will prove my appreciation some day."

"Then I will be more than repaid; but here is a roll of bank-notes, amounting to a thousand dollars."

"I shall take that as a loan, and some day repay you."

"We will so consider it then, if you please," and Rossmore handed up the money, then the basket of lunch and bundle of clothing, adding:

"I will be here after eight bells to see you off, and will now fill the keg in the sail-boat with water, and get her shipshape for your cruise, so there will be no delay to-night."

The little sail-boat was a cat-rig, stanch craft, with considerable beam and about twenty-five feet in length.

"Her cockpit was deep and gloomy, and she could go through a rough sea and be readily handled by one man who was a good sailor."

The water keg forward was filled from a spring near by, and all was made shipshape on board by the lieutenant, who then walked away toward the highway.

The fugitive watched him with dread, fearing that he was going to Bronx Hall, and gave a sigh of relief as he saw him turn off toward Hurst Haven.

Then he took out the roll of money and counted it with eager fingers, after which he opened the bag of gold given him by his sister.

"Fifteen hundred here," he muttered.

"I told him I had a couple of hundred but I

should have said thousands," he said with a chuckle, drawing from an inner pocket a roll of bank notes, which he also carefully counted.

"Yes, here are twenty-five hundred, which with Rossmore's thousand and Bessie's gold make four thousand dollars."

"Then I have these," and he took out the leather case and opened it, the act revealing a necklace and pair of bracelets, set in gems.

"These are worth every dollar of two thousand, and I'll see how my little buckskin sack figures up."

So saying he took from his belt a small bag of buckskin and emptied the contents in his hand.

They were rubies, diamonds and emeralds, two score in number.

"These are worth about five thousand I should say, as well as I can judge, so I will have a pretty good sum to work on for a new vessel."

"With my own vessel and crew, I can get, as Broncton Hughes, I guess, privateersman papers, and if I do not make a name that will get a pardon, by Heaven I will turn pirate, for already my neck is in the noose."

With this evil threat, the outcast ate his breakfast and then settled himself to sleep once more, knowing that he would be all night at sea, and anxious to get all the rest that he could.

It was late in the afternoon when he awoke, and, from his point of observation, through the lattice window in the loft, he saw several boats from the Sea Siren out in the inlet, their crews engaged in fishing.

He was very nervous at this, and more so when one of the boats, containing half a dozen seamen rowed ashore and took possession of the boat-house.

His heart seemed to stand still with dread for one moment, and then to beat so loud that he feared the men would hear it.

The men laughed and joked for awhile, throwing their lines in from the boat-house, and seemed determined to remain some time.

The cold sweat stood on the face of Hugh Bronx like great beads, for he knew but a few feet separated him from his enemies.

He dared not move, hardly to breathe, fearing to make the slightest sound.

"Suppose one of them should take it into his head to have a look up here?" he thought.

Suddenly the laughter and voices of the men ceased, and one said:

"There comes the lieutenant, lads."

Knowing Moncrief as a lieutenant, and not knowing that he had lately been promoted to a captaincy, Hugh Bronx naturally supposed that it was he, and instantly he gave himself up as lost.

"A quick step was heard coming along the pier, and then a voice said:

"What luck, lads?"

"Good luck, sir, especially here," answered a seaman.

"I think, lads, as this is a private dock, you had better not remain here."

"All right, lieutenant, we feared we might be doing wrong."

"No wrong, coxswain, but then your bait and fishes might litter up the boat-house, and ladies often come here, you know."

"Yes, sir, we'll go."

"And I'll try my luck with you, if you have a spare line, and then return in the boat to the schooner."

The men seemed pleased to have their lieutenant's company, an extra line was found, and entering their boat they pulled away.

"Thank God! Rossmore is my friend," said Hugh Bronx, as the boat rowed off.

But it was a long time before the hiding out-cast could get his nerves back again.

As dark came on he grew anxious, and started as the distant striking of eight bells on the Sea Siren was heard.

He had not long then to wait, for twenty minutes after he heard a rapid step upon the pier, and then came a voice below:

"Bronx!"

"Ay, ay!"

"I am ready."

"I'll be right down, sir."

He tossed down his traps and provisions, and then dropped upon the floor of the boat-house himself.

Rossmore had already a boat alongside, and said, simply:

"Get in, please."

In silence the outcast obeyed, and was rowed out to the little sail-boat.

His things were quickly put on board, the sail hoisted and anchor hove.

Then Rossmore stepped back into his row-boat, and said:

"Good-by, Bronx, and I wish you success."

"You have it in your power to redeem the past, and for your own sake, and that of your mother and sister, I hope that you will."

"Good-by and good luck."

He held out his hand and grasped the hand of the fugitive.

Hugh Bronx made no reply, but taking the tiller in one hand, raised his hat with the other and sailed away.

The wind was fair, the tide running out, and

watching him, as he rowed out upon the waters in his wake, Rossmore saw the sail-boat go out of the inlet and disappear seaward in the darkness.

CHAPTER XX.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

HAVING seen Hugh Bronx started well on his way, wherever that way might lead him, Rossmore rowed rapidly back to the boat-house, and wended his steps up toward Bronx Hall.

He had promised Bessie he would call that evening, though he told her that he could not come until late, as he would be on duty until eight bells, and so he knew she would be expecting him.

His captain he knew was enjoying the hospitalities of Hurst Haven, and had decided to remain several days in the cove at anchor, so he was not afraid of a hasty departure.

What he had done for Hugh Bronx, whom he despised, had been for the sake of Bessie, whom he loved.

He could understand that where Hugh Bronx had married Sibyl Hurst, and settled down to a quiet life, he might have made a very respectable member of society; but where his love for Sibyl had been unrequited, and his jealous and wicked nature aroused, he had become evil to the very core.

"I hope he will do well, and he has the opportunity to do so; but I doubt it."

"Still, if he had remained here Captain Moncrief would have been compelled to arrest and hang him, for the admiral would not pardon him living, that is sure, so I acted for the best, and I will keep the secret."

So said Rossmore as he approached Bronx Hall.

Enveloped in a shawl Bessie was walking the piazza awaiting him, and she greeted him warmly, and leading him into the comfortable sitting-room begged that he would excuse her mother, as she was not feeling very well and had retired.

Now, Rossmore was sorry that Mrs. Bronx was not feeling well, but he was perfectly willing to excuse her, and said so.

A bright fire burned upon the hearth, for the autumn days were at hand, and the room looked very inviting.

After a few words of ordinary conversation, Bessie asked:

"Who do you think were here to-day?"

"Captain Hurst and Miss Sibyl?"

"Yes, and they were so kind, so sympathetic that the clouds that passed between us have faded away."

"They spoke of poor Hugh most kindly, and mother was deeply touched by their visit."

"I was at Hurst Haven with Captain Moncrief when they drove away, and they seemed pleased at the reception you gave them, which convinced both the captain and Miss Sibyl that you no longer blamed them for all that had happened."

"No, and more now than ever I do not blame them."

"But, Lieutenant Rossmore?"

"Well, Miss Bronx?"

"What vessel was that that ran out of the basin just now?"

"Did one go out?" and Rossmore's face flushed.

"One did."

"I saw no large vessel go out."

"I did not say a large vessel, for I recognized the craft as the Bronx Hall sail-boat."

"You recognized it?"

"Yes, for I was on the piazza with my night-glass, and it is the best glass I ever saw, for my father had it made for him."

"It is a fine glass, doubtless."

"It is so true that I saw you leave the sail-boat in a skiff and row ashore, after the other had sailed out of the inlet."

"You saw this, Miss Bronx?"

"I certainly did, and I watched you come on up the path to the house."

"Indeed?" and Rossmore was greatly confused.

"Shall I tell you who was in that sail-boat, sir?"

"Do you know?"

"I do."

"You recognized him?"

"Yes; so tell me how and where you met my brother, whom you told us you had seen killed upon the deck of his vessel."

"Miss Bronx, as you seem to have had the remarkable vision to recognize your brother in that boat, I may as well tell you the truth."

"I shall expect the whole truth, so pray do not deceive me in one single thing."

"I will not."

"You promise this?"

"I do."

"Pardon me, but do you so pledge yourself upon your honor as a gentleman and an officer?"

"I do."

"Then please tell me your story."

"You are sure no one can hear?"

"Not a soul."

"Last night when I left here I stood an instant in your boat-house gazing out over the waters, when I saw a boat approaching."

"I awaited, saw the occupant land, recognized him from words he uttered aloud, and at once arrested him."

"Arrested him?"

"I did."

"This was last night?"

"It was."

"At what hour?"

"Within twenty minutes after my leaving here."

Bessie sighed and said in a low tone:

"Go on, please."

"It was your brother, whom I did believe dead, and he told me how he had escaped."

"His condition was pitiable, and I sought to have him go in hiding until he could clear up certain matters there is no need to speak of."

"He followed my advice, but was in no condition to depart, so I helped him into the boat-house loft and told him I would bring him food and clothing this morning."

"Did you do so?"

"I did."

"Did you give him any money?"

"Well, yes."

"How much?"

"Only enough to keep him from want for some little time."

"How much, please?"

"One thousand dollars."

Bessie started, and asked:

"Did you promise him this last night?"

"Yes, for he said he only had a couple of hundred."

"And then?"

"I told him to take the Bronx Hall boat, letting it be supposed she had gotten loose and drifted out to sea."

"To-night I went to the boat-house, and having already sunk his boat, that it should tell no story, I aided him to put to sea for New York."

"What advice did you give him?"

"To go as a soldier, win a name, and return in honor, when his affair with Moncrief would be pardoned."

"Lieutenant Rossmore, have you told me the truth?"

"Do you doubt me, Miss Bronx?"

"Pardon me for so doing, but when I know that you deceived me before, I cannot help it."

"Miss Bronx?"

"Nay, do not get angry, but let me tell you that I have seen my poor brother."

"You?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"At what hour?"

"More than an hour after you left."

"Where?"

"Here."

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"And your mother?"

"Knows nothing."

"Thank God for that, but tell me all," and Rossmore spoke in a quick, earnest way, as though greatly moved.

"I had not retired, for I was mourning for poor Hugh."

"It was after one o'clock, when I was startled by a pebble striking the window glass."

"The dastard!" muttered Rossmore between his shut teeth.

"Of course I was alarmed, but I thought that perhaps you had returned from some cause, so I raised the window, mother having just gone to sleep in her room."

"I heard a voice and it was Hugh's."

"I nearly fainted, but controlling my emotion I answered him, lowered the window, went down-stairs and let him into the dining-room."

"He was in a fearful plight, looked haggard, had a slight wound in his head, and seemed half-starved."

"I set food before him and he told me his story."

"The same as mine?" anxiously said Rossmore.

"As to his escape, yes, but what he told me made me regard Captain Moncrief and you, Lieutenant Rossmore, as the noblest of men."

"I do not understand."

"I shall make it most plain, when I say that Hugh, in desperation, told me all of his evil career, that the admiral had given secret orders for Captain Moncrief to hunt him down and hang him, and more, that his crew it was that had attacked Hurst Haven that night, and the Sea Siren had followed him to sea and sunk his schooner."

"Miss Bronx."

"Oh, I know the truth now, and that you and Captain Moncrief, for the sake of mother and myself, to spare poor Hugh from going to his grave in infamy, told that story."

"I forgive you for it, and God bless you for it; but Hugh told all."

"And he told you he had seen me?"

"No; but he told me that he would be hanged, if known to be alive, and wished to escape at once, seeking an officer's rank in the army, where he could win fame under another name, just the advice you gave him."

"Well, I am glad he is gone, for it would have

been his death to have remained, I frankly say, now that you know all."

"Did not Hugh tell you he had seen me, when you went to him to-night?"

"He did not."

"Did you give him the money?"

"Oh yes."

"One thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"And all else you promised?"

"Yes, I got him a suit, in which he could appear in the streets of New York, until he could fit himself out."

"Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"I gave Hugh money."

"You did?"

"Yes, for he told me he was utterly destitute."

"I am sorry."

"So am I, for I gave him a bag of gold."

"I hope not a large sum?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"Then he certainly has ample."

"And more."

"What, still more?"

"Yes."

"Then he had money he told me not of."

"That I do not know; but I gave him a present my mother intended for me, should I ever marry."

"It was a jewel necklace and bracelets, their value being all of two thousand dollars."

"Scamp!"

The word hissed from the lips of Rossmore ere he could prevent it, as he sprung to his feet; but turning quickly, he said:

"I humbly beg you your pardon, Miss Bronx."

"Ah, Lieutenant Rossmore, you but spoke the truth, I fear, and I dread the future of my poor brother."

"He has promised to lead a different life, under his name changed to Broncton Hughes, and has said he would, when he had attained rank, write me that he had escaped when his vessel sunk, but wished to keep it secret, from all excepting mother and myself, and would explain when he returned home."

"Now, Lieutenant Rossmore, I beg that this remain as a dead secret between us, and I will hope for the best."

"It shall be as you wish, Miss Bronx," was the answer, and Rossmore left Bronx Hall that night, thoroughly convinced that if the fugitive did not mend his ways at once he would turn pirate, what at heart he really believed him to be.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LOVE PLEDGE.

It was a great pleasure to both Captain Hurst as well as Sibyl, to find that they had done their duty in going over to call upon Mrs. Bronx and Bessie in their affliction.

They had been doubtful regarding their reception, but with the consciousness that no wrong had been done by them toward Hugh Bronx, that it was his sins against them, and that the mother and sister had been changed by his false story of the affair, they were willing to face rebuff in a visit to Bronx Hall and did so.

When Mrs. Bronx saw the one armed Skipper, and gazed into his still haggard face, she could not but feel pity, while the phase put upon her son's story by Rossmore, had convinced her that Sibyl had done him no wrong, but refused his love as she did not love him in return.

So the father and daughter were received by the mother and daughter, and the shadows between them passed away under the deep sympathy felt and shown by Sibyl and the skipper.

"I wish you to meet Captain Moncrief," whispered Sibyl to Bessie.

"I fear he will not care to meet us, when my brother was the one to nearly cost him his life."

"Ah, you do not know Manton Moncrief, Bessie, for he is the noblest man I ever saw."

"Is he handsome?"

"I never saw a handsomer man."

"Lieutenant Rossmore I think very handsome," suggested Bessie.

"And so do I, and he is a noble, splendid fellow."

"I liked him when he was one of the crew of the Mermaid, and father said then he was fit for the quarter-deck; and he is a superb officer and captain. Moncrief loves him as a brother."

"We like him too, sincerely."

"Yes, and you'll be losing your heart to him too."

"You speak from experience, Sibyl?"

Sibyl blushed at this shot, but answered:

"Well, if we both did lose our hearts with those two men, Bessie, I would feel that they were in the best of keeping; but you know we owe so much to Captain Moncrief, and father tried to cancel the debt in part by giving him the Mermaid, which he had once altered into a schooner, and she sails nearly half as fast again since—why she is a marvel, and Captain Moncrief has called her the Sea Siren."

"That is what poor Hugh called you, Sibyl, the Sea Siren," and the tears came into Bessie's eyes.

"Yes, and Captain Moncrief named her after me."

Thus talked the two beautiful girls, while Skipper Hurst and Mrs. Bronx conversed together.

Returning to Hurst Haven, Sibyl told Manton Moncrief and Allen Rossmore, who were there, of their visit, and seemed most happy over the result.

"I really do not see how you can help falling in love with Bessie Bronx, Lieutenant Rossmore?" said Sibyl.

"I cannot," was the frank reply, while he added, with a sly look at Moncrief: "I take after my captain, you see."

Moncrief blushed, as also did Sibyl, the latter hastily changing the subject.

What caused the lingering of the Sea Siren in the cove was very evident to her officers and crew, for they seemed to know intuitively that he was in love with Sibyl.

They understood that he was hardly yet perfectly strong, after the severe wound, given him by Hugh Bronx, under the pretense that he fired at Rossmore; but they were glad that he was willing to rest in the cove and recuperate, for the fishing was excellent, a number of the crew went gunning each day, the duties were light, they camped on the shore; and what was appreciated more than all, Skipper Hurst would send them down from the farm quantities of fresh meats, fowls, eggs, vegetables and fruit, until Moncrief remarked one day:

"I'll utterly impoverish you, Captain Hurst, if I don't go to sea."

"Nonsense, Moncrief, for I have far more than we can consume on the place, there is no ready market, and I'm glad to treat your men well."

"Your father is very kind, most generous, Sibyl, but I shall have to go to sea to keep him from emptying his larders," had said Manton Moncrief that night, as the two sat together in the parlor, while the skipper enjoyed his pipe in the sitting-room.

"When must you go?" was the low response.

"To-morrow."

"So soon?"

"There is work for me to do at sea."

"But you are hardly able yet to take full command and work."

"That I have tried to find as an excuse to remain longer; but I cannot, for I am perfectly well."

"When will we see you again?"

"I hardly know, for I feel how that with the Sea Siren I can do immense service to our struggling people, and I will feel it my duty to cruise where I can find the most foes."

"Ah! what a life of danger you lead."

"Sibyl, I am anxious to go from here through Long Island Sound, via New York, then up the coast as far as Halifax, cruise off that port a week and back again to New York with what prizes I may have taken."

"I desire to be gone about two months—"

"So long?"

"Yes, for that will bring me back here about the day before Christmas."

"That will be delightful, if you will only spend Christmas week with us."

"Sibyl, I hope to come back with greater fame, with renewed honor to my name, and that name, with my hand, my fortune, such as it is, and every atom of my heart, I wish to offer to you."

"I love you, Sibyl, and have done so since I saved the Mermaid from the Sea Torch, and I ask you, when I return here in two months, to become my wife."

"Will you, Sibyl?"

Her answer was to hold out both of her hands which he grasped, and drawing her toward him he kissed her while she said softly:

"You know I love you, Moncrief."

"Now let us go in and see what Captain Hurst has to say to all this," and Manton Moncrief led the maiden into the sitting-room and frankly asked the skipper for his daughter.

"You deserve her, Moncrief, so take her, and God bless you both, and I'll see to it that you have a wedding worthy of you, when Christmas comes round," was the hearty response of the old sailor-farmer.

And so the Sea Siren set sail the next day, her young commander full of hope for the future.

CHAPTER XXII.

PICKED UP.

HUGH BRONX sailed out of the inlet, congratulating himself upon his good fortune.

He had escaped from his sinking schooner with his life, had the name of having fought his vessel to the death against a British cruiser twice his size, had died like a brave man before the world, and yet had reached his home in safety.

His enemy, Rossmore, had proven his friend, had helped him, told him what to do, given him money, and he had received more from his sister, until he felt himself rich.

"This sail-boat will bring me a couple of hundred in the city, and that sum will fit me

out in clothes, a disguise, and enable me to look around for a vessel.

"If I cannot find one to suit me there, I can in Boston, Portsmouth, Portland or Baltimore, and once Captain Broncton Hughes—I rather like the name—reports to the authorities with his own vessel and crew, and asks to arm her as a privateer, the proper papers will be granted."

"Then I shall make a name for myself, but, should privateering not pay, buccaneering shall."

So talked to himself the fugitive as he sailed along.

As he knew that the tide must soon flow in, and the wind was off the sea, he ran well out to get an offing and then head directly for New York Bay, hoping to pass in by the Hook just before dawn.

Lying at ease in the stern, his hand upon the tiller, he held on until the land was two leagues or more astern.

Then he put his boat for the Sandy Hook Light, a long distance off.

The light in the windows of his own home from which he was a fugitive, and the beacon on Hurst Haven he could see off on his starboard quarter, and as he gazed on the former he muttered:

"Poor sis; I wish she had had more money, or given me other jewels that she had, for I need more to get me a first-class craft and fit her out as I wish."

"I do not care for any vessel that cannot lead a fleet, for what I cannot easily defeat I must run from—no hard fighting for me, for it is gold and silver I seek, not steel and iron."

"Ah! I have a bright idea."

"Mother has a snug little sum in her agent's hands, some six thousand dollars, which she threatened to draw out this winter and buy the adjoining farm to us."

"I can write her name so that no one will ever suspect it to be a forgery, and I'll give the order to the man I buy the schooner from to get cashed for me."

"No one will suspect, and should mother draw on it, she will never know who got it, and besides, she has been threatening to buy that farm for three years past but never does it."

"Yes, I am fixed now, that is certain, for if I find a very expensive craft, I can offer the owner one-third interest in my venture, and he will be glad enough to let the vessel go."

Thus plotted the Fugitive Privateersman as he sailed along.

As his eyes rested upon the receding beacon in Hurst Haven cupola, he muttered savagely.

"Curses on you, Sibyl Hurst, I have not yet given you up, nor have I forgotten the deep debt of revenge I owe to you, Captain Moncrief."

"Curses upon you, as you now sit together there, making love, while I am a fugitive upon the face of the earth."

He fairly gritted the words through his shut teeth, as is the case with the wicked, laying his misfortunes upon the shoulders of others.

So on his boat went, making about four knots to the hour, rising and falling upon the waves, and showing herself a good sea boat.

Suddenly he sprung to his feet and let go his tiller, the catboat at once running up into the wind, as sharp and stern rung out:

"Cat rig ahoy!"

He was two leagues from the land, and had no idea any one was near him, let alone a vessel, and the stern hail fairly startled him so sudden and unexpected it was.

His boat having come to, as he released the tiller, with the quickness of craft of that class, he had but to turn his gaze upon the vessel from whence had come the hail.

He saw, not a cable length away, a schooner, with tall masts, and under only mainsail, foresail and jib.

"It is the Sea Siren!" cried the fugitive privateersman.

With these words, he hardly had strength to keep from falling.

"Ahoy, that sail-boat!"

The voice was louder and sterner than before.

"Ahoy, the Sea Siren!" was the reply, in husky tones.

"What boat is that?"

"They may not know me, so I will answer, so as to throw them off their guard."

"What boat is that, I asked," came in menacing tones.

"Ay, ay, sir; it is a fishing-boat from the shore."

"We want just such fresh fish as you carry, so get under way, and when we lay to run up alongside."

"I am lost!" groaned Hugh Bronx, as he saw the schooner come to, and his hands trembled as he hauled in the sheet to get headway once more on his craft.

"I was a fool to run out to sea so far. Oh, if I was only near enough to run ashore!" he groaned.

"Come, my man, you are delaying us."

The voice caused him to put about and head for the schooner, and soon he ran close up under her stern.

"Throw him a line to make fast!"

"There, now, jump aboard, my man!"

Hugh Bronx obeyed, and was met by a young man in uniform, as he saw by the battle-lanterns on deck.

"Well, who and what are you?"

"A poor fisherman, sir, off from the shore."

"That is a strange craft to fish in, for it looks like a yacht."

"I had to take her, sir, as my smack was dismantled."

"Ah, I see; but, why do you fish at night, and alone?"

"The British cruisers chase us by day."

"Two of you men jump on board that boat and see what you can find there."

The order was quickly obeyed, and the search was made.

"Ah, there are his traps—a suit of clothes, blanket, and some food."

"Good wine, this, I guess, for a fisherman."

"Did you find any fish?"

"Not one, sir."

"Any lines, or nets?"

"No, sir."

"What do you fish with, my man?"

Hugh Bronx was silent, and the officer said:

"I think you are a fraud, and I'll send you to the captain."

"Oh, sir, let me go, please."

"No, I must know who you are, and you may be useful."

"Is Captain Moncrief on board?"

"Captain who?"

"Captain Manton Moncrief?"

"He is not."

"Thank God!" broke from the lips of the fugitive, but the young officer heard what he said.

"Is Lieutenant Rossmore on board?" quickly asked Hugh Bronx.

"No."

"Who is in command?"

"The captain."

"You said the captain was not on board."

"I said Captain Moncrief was not on board."

"Ah! is not this the American cruiser, Sea Siren?"

The officer laughed, and responded:

"Come down into the cabin, and you shall see."

Then he took the trembling fugitive by the arm and led him down the companion-way into the cabin.

An officer in captain's uniform was seated at the cabin table, closely examining a chart.

As his lieutenant entered with his prisoner he looked up, and the Fugitive Privateersman gave a start, while from his lips fell the hardly audible words:

"I am indeed doomed!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

THE one who was seated at the cabin table on board the schooner, Hugh Bronx had seen before, and he uttered the words, "I am indeed doomed," with a sure conviction that he was lost.

The commander of the vessel was a man verging upon fifty years, with iron-gray hair and beard, a compact form, and a face that was hard, stern, and cruel.

He gazed at the prisoner with his piercing eyes, and said:

"Who have you there, Basil?"

"I sighted a cat-rig ahead, sir; we ran up to her, and this man was alone on board."

"He claims to be a fisherman, but his craft is a yacht; he has no fish, lines, or nets on board; his lockers contained good clothing, and food that no common man could be in possession of, so I brought him down to you, captain."

"All right; we'll see who and what he is very quickly. I think I have seen his face before."

"Come, sir, out with the truth, for the yard-arm awaits liars; let me know just who you are."

Hugh Bronx saw that the commander was in earnest, and he said, in a low tone:

"My name is Hugh Bronx, sir."

"Your name is the least information that I seek to glean," was the stern rejoinder.

"Captain, I have seen this man before, and if he cannot tell his story in truth, I can," remarked the lieutenant.

Hugh Bronx turned even more white than before as he glanced hastily at the young officer, while he said:

"Yes, I have met you before, but I do not recall where."

"In Charleston."

"Ah!"

Still Hugh Bronx could not recall him.

"Come, sir, out with your story, or I shall get my lieutenant to tell it," sternly ordered the captain.

"My name is Hugh Bronx, sir, and—"

"Bah! your name is nothing. What are you?"

"I was on the Mermaid, as mate, sir, when you captured her."

"The Mermaid? Let me see: I have captured so many vessels I quite forget this one."

"The brig, she was then, commanded and armed by your brother, Captain Bianca."

The old man sprang to his feet and grasping Bronx by the shoulder cried:

"Hail you were mate on *his* craft, were you?"

"Yes, sir."

"When he was on his way to Charleston?"

"Yes, sir."

"I did not kill him then?"

"No, sir; but he lost his arm."

"Where is he now?"

"At his home."

"And his daughter?"

"With him."

"And that home?"

"Is about four leagues from here."

"I see; it is as I found out; but the name of his home?"

"Hurst Haven Farm."

"And what has become of that terrible fellow who drove me away from the brig?"

"Captain Moncrief?"

"Yes."

"He is there."

"Where?"

"At Hurst Haven, sir."

"Is he married to my brother's child?"

"No, sir."

"What is he doing there, then?"

"He brought the captain and his daughter home from Charleston, and often visits there since."

"Ah, yes, I see; but, where is his vessel?"

"In the basin near Hurst Haven."

"There is an inlet there?"

"Yes, sir."

"A dangerous one to enter?"

"Impossible, without a good pilot."

"Do you know how to pilot a vessel in there?"

"Yes, sir."

"And there are other good pilots on the coast who know the channel I suppose?"

"No, sir, the inlet has been of no use to others than Captain Hurst and my farm—I mean and another farm on the coast, so that there are but three persons who know the channel, if I except now Captain Moncrief."

Both Bianca and Basil had noticed the slip of the tongue made by Hugh Bronx, when he had said *my* farm; but they showed no sign of it, and the chief asked:

"Who are the three pilots?"

"Captain Hurst, his daughter and myself, with Captain Moncrief."

"You are a valuable man, sir, as you can run a vessel into that channel, so I will hold on to you; but, what do you think my

chances would be to capture this famous Sea Siren?"

"Bad, sir."

"If I ran in, under your pilotage, and attacked him at night at anchor?"

"He lies in a cove, so anchored that he commands the sheet of water from the inlet, and his watch never sleep."

"There is not room for you to run in and round alongside, and he would rake you fore and aft with his broadsides."

"I have a strong craft here, a heavy armament and a fighting crew."

"Your schooner, I first thought, was the Sea Siren, sir; but if you had a vessel double the size of this one, I would not advise you to attack Manton Moncrief."

"You seem to admire him."

"*I hate him!*" and the words were uttered savagely.

"Ah! then I should think you would wish to see him worsted."

"I would; but it is because I know he would be the victor that I urge against the attack, as he is not one to surrender his vessel, especially under the shadow of Hurst Haven, where the eyes of Sibyl Hurst would be upon him; while, if the wind or tide failed you while in the basin, you would be taken by the country soldiers, who have a battery over at Hempstead Plains."

"You reason well; but you are willing to serve as pilot if I go in?"

"I am your prisoner, sir, and compelled to obey; but I know the result."

"Egad, where Moncrief is concerned, you are right; but if it was any one else I would not hesitate."

"Nor I, sir."

"What is Moncrief's intention—or don't you know?"

"In what respect?"

"As to his cruising."

"I heard some of his crew talking yesterday, and they said he would cruise along the Long Island Coast for a couple of months, and then they knew not where he was going."

"A couple of months?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, for it will give us time, Basil."

"Yes, chief."

"We can run down and get the Sea Sword, for she must be nearly ready now, and returning together I think we will prove more than a match for the Sea Siren."

"Yes, sir."

"What a trio of beauties the three schooners would make, Basil!"

"Indeed they would, chief!"

"You would command this one, I would take the Sea Siren, and my son have his own vessel, and we would not be afraid of a line-of-battle ship."

The old chief rubbed his hands with glee, at the anticipation of his little plan, while Hugh Bronx began to congratulate himself that he would be set free, and questioned no more, when suddenly came the query:

"Now, sir, let us know all you have to tell about yourself."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PRISONER.

"Mr. Bronx, it will go better with you to make a clean breast of your Charleston affairs to the chief."

The words were addressed to the prisoner by Basil, the lieutenant.

Hugh Bronx started as he heard his name spoken, for he had forgotten that he had given it, and it proved that he was indeed known, and he said quickly:

"You know me?"

"Yes, I was in Charleston when you had some trouble there."

"I will have to tell all, for there is no knowing what they do not know," thought Hugh Bronx.

"Well, sir?" said the chief.

"I was second mate of the Mermaid, sir, and I live on the farm adjoining Hurst Haven."

"When we went to Charleston I discovered that Miss Sibyl Hurst, whom I had hoped to marry some day, did not love me, casting me aside for Moncrief."

"Ah!"

The chief meant a great deal by that simple exclamation.

"I was naturally enraged, but yet sought to free Captain Moncrief from the British, for a large brig had captured his vessel."

"I failed, was taken prisoner, and Moncrief having escaped, rescued me, retook his schooner and captured the brig."

"This made me hate him still more, and, refusing a lieutenancy under him on the Mermaid, which Captain Hurst had had altered to a brig, and presented to him, I bought his schooner and started as a privateersman."

"There was some trouble, I believe," suggested Basil.

"Yes, we quarreled, fought a duel, and he disarmed me, though I never before met my equal with the sword."

"One of my officers, who was my second, mutinied, and in shooting at him I hit Moncrief."

"Believing that I had killed him I set sail, knowing it would go hard with me, and no one believe it an accident."

"I was chased to sea by the brig which Moncrief had taken, was fired on, and escaped."

"It seems I was outlawed for this, and so I kept at sea, sending in prizes to the Government, until I was met by an enemy vastly my superior and sunk."

"I was wounded and stunned, and clinging to a boat thus escaped death and capture."

"I was in New York the other day and heard of your vessel having been sunk, and it seems your services caused the admiral to whitewash your misdeeds, for you were not referred to as an outlaw," said Basil.

"That was because they believed me dead; but alive I would be treated as though I was a pirate."

"And hanged?" asked the chief with a smile.

"Yes, sir."

"You are in hard luck?"

"It seems I am, unless you allow me to go."

"When overhauled you were heading to New York?" said Basil.

"Yes, I hoped to get another vessel to take out as a privateer, not intending to make myself known."

"Then you have money?"

"I could raise funds, sir, from agents in New York," was the evasive reply.

"I see; well, what do you think of turning pirate in earnest?"

"I turn pirate, sir?" and Hugh Bronx looked the personification of injured innocence.

The chief laughed, and said:

"Why not, for if your Government knew you to be alive they would hang you."

"They do no more than that with real pirates, so I say that you had better make the best of your present situation."

"I have been on a cruise, and a successful one, for I have sent half a dozen prizes home."

"Home?"

"Yes, to my Gibraltar, my Island Bastile, whither I will now go, though it was my intention to pay Hurst Haven a visit."

"As you say that this Moncrief is there now, I do not wish to crowd him, any more than you."

"As he is likely to remain in the vicinity for two months, according to your statement, I will have ample time to run to the Island Bastile for a reinforcement that will enable me to master Moncrief and capture his vessel."

"So thither I go, and you go with me."

"As a prisoner, sir?"

"We will not call it by so harsh a name, for I have sent my officers off and am very short-handed, and you can act as a luff, under Basil here."

"If you do not wish to do so, why then you can go below decks in irons."

"Will you not set me free, sir?"

"No."

"If I could give you a ransom of several thousand dollars, by your sending men to New York with me to bring back the money?"

"I would never see the money, or the men; besides, I have plenty of money just now, and I could not buy a channel pilot into that inlet for ten thousand dollars, in fact, could not get one, and you are just my man."

"I would send you ten thousand, sir, as a ransom."

"I would not let you go for fifty, so do not offer again."

Hugh Bronx saw that he was a prisoner to the pirate, and so determined to make the best of it.

The thought flashed across his mind that he would get his revenge upon Moncrief through Bianca, and then, by winning the pirate's confidence, he might get a vessel after all under his own command.

His neck was already in the noose, he well knew, and so he could suffer no more if taken, while, if he played his cards right, and he intended to do so, he would in the end come out all right.

So he said:

"I accept your kind offer, Captain Bianca, and you can order me to duty when you please, sir."

"You are wise; but now to your boat."

"It is a stanch yacht, sir, built for running in and out of the inlet, and is valuable."

"She may prove just what we wish."

"What is her size?"

"Twenty-five feet in length, ten in beam."

"Basil, unbend her sails, take her mast out, and haul her aboard, putting her where you think best on deck," was the chief's order.

Basil saluted and left the cabin, and Bianca said:

"Now, Mr. Bronx, you know what our terms are."

"Serve me well, and I'll enrich you; but prove treacherous, and I'll hang you in the rigging by your heels."

"Now go on deck and report to Lieutenant Basil, and he will show you your quarters and also tell you what duties you are to perform."

"I will do my duty, sir," said Hugh Bronx, and he saluted politely as he left the cabin.

The little yacht was already stripped of her canvas under the nimble hands of the pirate crew, and half an hour after the boat was lashed securely amidships.

Then the Sea Torch fell off to the breeze, and under a spread of canvas went flying along on a southerly course, her destination being the Island Bastile of Bianca the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ARRIVAL AT THE ISLAND BASTILE.

The pirate schooner Sea Torch was a very fast sailer.

She was of about the same tonnage as the Sea Siren, and the improvements which the chief had made in her hull and rig had added greatly to her speed.

The old buccaneer had sailed on a cruise for booty, leaving his son in charge of the Island Bastile, and also building the new vessel upon the model of the Sea Siren.

He had taken Basil along as his first officer and but for his sharp eyes, that had sighted the sail-boat, the capture of Hugh Bronx would not have been made.

Having made a very successful cruise, Bianca was in a good humor, and having started his prizes to the Island Bastile, made up his mind to seek revenge upon his brother, the skipper, against whom he felt the intensest hatred.

Having found out his place of abode, and secured a chart of the coast, he had determined to await daylight, get his bearings, discover Hurst Haven, and arrange for a visit there.

The capture of Hugh Bronx had changed this plan, for he had no desire to face the commander of the Sea Siren unless the odds were greatly in his favor.

He had shortened his crew greatly, by sending his prizes home, and was therefore willing to go to the Island Bastile, capturing any merchantmen that came in his way while en route, but dodging any cruiser.

It was early in the afternoon when the Island Bastile was sighted, and Bianca lost no time in saying to Hugh Bronx:

"Mr. Bronx, you have done your duties as an officer well, sir, and I have to thank you."

"I have confidence in you, of course, yet I desire that you go into the cabin and remain there until we reach an anchorage."

"Certainly, sir," said Hugh, though he was surprised at the request, and regretted it, as

he had desired to see the approach to the pirate haunt.

"I do not care to have you see the approach to our rendezvous until I know you better, so do not be curious after you go to the cabin, but keep away from the stern ports."

Hugh Bronx bowed and descended to the cabin, not even daring to cast a glance about him, as he saw the fierce eyes of the chief upon him.

Wishing to do nothing to lose favor in the sight of Bianca the Buccaneer, he took a seat so that he could not see out of the stern ports and there remained until he heard the plunge of the anchor, loud ringing cheers from the shore, answered by the crew of the schooner.

"Come on deck, Mr. Bronx," called out the chief, and obeying the fugitive glanced quickly about him.

His face was the picture of astonishment, for the prizes lately taken, had arrived, and the rock-guarded basin seemed full of vessels.

A number of men taken on the prizes, had been only too willing to cast their lot with the pirates, so that fully two hundred men were visible on the shore.

Upon her ways, ready to launch, Hugh Bronx saw the hull of a beautiful vessel.

The scene was a surprise to him, but the chief called out:

"I am going ashore now, Bronx, so Basil will bring you up to the cabin to supper, where you are to meet my son."

"But what do you think of yonder new vessel for pirate builders?"

He pointed to the vessel ready for launching, as he spoke.

"It is a beautiful craft, sir, and the very model of the Sea Siren."

"Ah! you think so?"

"I know so, for she is the perfect outline."

"She was built on the model of the Sea Siren."

"Impossible."

"Why, Bronx?"

"Because the model of the Sea Siren was the design of Captain Hurst."

"Well, yonder craft is after her model, Bronx; but I will see you at supper," and the old buccaneer sprung into his boat and was rowed ashore, the men cheering him as he landed.

"This is a strange place," said Hugh Bronx to Basil.

The latter laughed lightly while he added:

"And a stranger people."

"All pirates?"

"Sea Rovers say rather."

"Under the chief?"

"Yes."

"He has a perfect fleet."

"He has sunk and burned many more than he has here, by far."

"He has a fearful name."

"And deserves it."

"I do not doubt that; but who is his son?"

"A chip of the old block, as far as pluck, discipline and seamanship go."

"He has just recovered from a wound given him by your friend, Captain Moncrief."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and it nearly cost him his life."

"How was it?"

"The young captain thought he could capture the cruiser one night, when she ran in and anchored near where the Sea Torch was hiding."

"He did not though?"

"No, he attacked in boats, was beaten back, and I barely had time to save the captain's life, from a sword-thrust by Moncrief."

"But we got him back to the boats and escaped, a very badly whipped party."

"Why did he attack the cruiser?"

"He wanted the vessel for his own use."

"I see; but tell me, Basil, where am I?"

"In the Island Bastile."

"And where is that?"

"You will have to ask the chief for all information on that point," was the answer.

"I am no fool," said Hugh Bronx, and Basil laughed.

While Basil was getting all ship-shape on board the schooner, Hugh Bronx looked about him with the deepest interest, gazing at the vessels at anchor, the cabins, the distant home of the chief, the overhanging walls and rock, the new schooner and all that there was to attract his eyes.

A boat put off from the shore, and it held but one occupant, a negro.

"There comes Jocko now," said Basil.

"Who is Jocko?"

"One of Captain Bianca's black imps."

"Hol Jocko, I am glad to see that ebony face of yours again," called out Basil.

"Awful glad ter see Massa Basil ag'in, also, sah," replied the negro.

"How is Gringo?"

"Well and hearty, sah; but Massa Cap'n done sent me to say he be glad to hab you and de strange ossifer come ter supper wid him."

"We'll do it with alacrity, Jocko, for your mate has not a superior as a cook in the world, and I well know what Captain Bianca's suppers are—something to remember, while he has the best wines that ever crossed the seas."

"We will have a treat, Bronx."

The two officers now entered the boat, which Jocko had brought to the gangway, and were rowed ashore.

The men saluted Basil politely, for he was a favorite with all, and landing, Jocko ran in toward the cabin.

As they entered the large and most comfortable cabin, the chief arose to meet the guests, saying as he did:

"Mr. Bronx, I desire to present you to my son, Captain Rafael Bianca!"

"Great God!" broke from the lips of Hugh Bronx as his eyes fell upon the young officer, and seeming to lose his nerve, he staggered back and sunk into a chair near the door, while the three men stood gazing upon him, two of them with amazement stamped on every feature of their faces.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HUGH BRONX SHOWS HIS HAND.

A COUPLE of weeks passed away, and Hugh Bronx had become quite well satisfied with his stay in the Island Bastile.

The new vessel had been launched, and rode like a duck upon the waters.

Her masts had been put in, and such beautiful spars they were, while they seemed large enough for a craft of twice her tonnage.

Her armament a great deal of attention was bestowed upon, and in its placing, it very much resembled the battery of the Sea Siren.

Every detail for small-arms, also, was looked to, and her canvas was new and shapely.

"She will fairly fly, I am sure," said young Captain Bianca one day, as he stood upon the cliff, gazing down upon her with great admiration in his eyes for his beautiful vessel.

His question had been addressed to Hugh Bronx, who had gone upon the cliff with him.

"Your vessel is a beauty, sir, from cabin to steerage, from keel to truck."

"How does she compare with the Sea Siren, Bronx?"

"Her equal, sir, if not her superior in some things."

"Well, Bronx, you are to sail upon her as second officer."

"I thank you, sir."

"Basil is to be my first lieutenant, you my second, and with myself as captain, we will need no other officers."

"And your father, sir?"

"Will take his old crew and officers."

"Will you go well manned?"

"Both the Sea Torch and the Sea Sword will, for we will carry ninety men each."

"A large crew, sir."

"There is work for us to do."

"I think you will out-sail the Sea Torch two to one."

"No, not as much as that, for the Sea Torch is very fast, and especially since we changed her rig a little."

"She will come off of the stocks clean and slick, and will doubtless hold the Sea Sword pretty well in a race; but we will soon know, for we sail in three days."

"So soon, sir?"

"Yes."

"On a cruise for prizes, I suppose?"

"Have you forgotten the talk you had with my father, and of which he told me?"

"Regarding what, sir?"

"Our destination."

"Ah, yes, to hunt down the Sea Siren, and take her?"

"Yes, that is our motive."

"Then he spoke of going to visit his brother at Hurst Haven?"

"Yes, and you are to be our pilot in there."

"Captain Bianca?" and Bronx spoke earnestly.

"Well, sir?"

"Your father seeks revenge upon Captain Hurst?"

"Yes."

"And you particularly seek to capture the Sea Siren?"

"Yes, for my own little revenge to capture her, and for my father's use I wish the vessel."

"Now, Captain Bianca, I have an offer to make you, sir."

"What is it?"

"Miss Sibyl Hurst I have loved since she was a little girl, and I felt assured that she would have become my wife but for the fact that she met Moncrief."

"Ah, Bronx, this meeting of that other man with women often upsets our little calculations."

"But you have my deepest sympathy."

"I love her still, and were she out from under the influence of Manton Moncrief I feel that she would give me back her affection and become my wife."

"You are hopeful, my fine fellow."

"I have reason to be, sir."

"Well, to your offer."

"I wish to say that if you kill Moncrief and capture his vessel, you will have had your satisfaction, while the chief will have gained his revenge in killing Captain Hurst."

"Well?"

"Now, loving Sibyl as I do, I do not wish to see her harmed."

"She is your father's niece, your cousin, and I wish to make her my wife."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir, and I will serve you as pilot, and in all else, if you will allow me to marry her and take her to the Island Bastile to live."

Captain Bianca showed no sign in his face as to what he thought of this proposition, but remained silent, gazing out over the waters.

Then he said, after a few minutes that seemed ages to Hugh Bronx:

"Bronx, you do your duty as an officer, serve me faithfully as a pilot when I need you, and I will pay you a sum that will make you comparatively rich, above what may be your pay and prize money."

"But as to allowing you to marry my cousin, Sibyl, without her consent, that is another thing."

"Just wait, and we will see what is best when Sibyl is our captive, for the man she marries she must marry with her eyes open and her own consent, not forced from her."

"I hope you do not think, sir, I would force Miss Hurst into a marriage with me," said Hugh Bronx, in an injured tone.

"My dear fellow, I do not know what you would do."

"I do not, in fact, know what I would do until the time comes to be tried."

"You have a slightly tarnished reputation, you know, and your love for my fair Sibyl might turn your brain, so we will wait and see what is best."

"Under the folds of yonder sable flag it is best not to plot too far ahead, for the sea is full of cruisers, American, English, Spanish, French and of other nations, and an unlucky shot by one double cut size, might cause us all to swing."

"No, I promise nothing, Bronx, but hope for everything, and that is all I can say just now."

"Now let us go on board the Sea Sword, for we must lose no time in getting ready for sea."

With this Hugh Bronx was outwardly satisfied, apparently; but inwardly his determination was:

"She shall be my wife against all odds."

"I swear it!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RIVAL RACERS.

As when he arrived at the Island Bastile, Hugh Bronx was sent below decks while the two vessels put to sea, when ready to start on their cruise.

Being an officer, a navigator, and, as the pirates believed, tricky, Hugh Bronx was not going to be allowed a chance to betray them, through any knowledge we might obtain of the location of the Island Bastile and its approaches.

The men who were allowed to be on deck, did not know the channels approaching the island, nor could any but these men run a vessel into the basin.

Those four men, the chief, his son, Lieutenant Basil, and Brent the signal officer.

In fitting the two vessels out for their cruise nothing had been left undone.

The Sea Torch had been painted, and all put in perfect shipshape on board.

The magazines were full of ammunition, the stores were all on board, and of the best, and the crew of ninety men had been drilled to perfection.

The chief seemed very proud of his vessel, and the four officers under him were his abject slaves, as were the men, though he was not cruel to his crew.

The Sea Sword was also in perfect trim, and her young commander and his two officers could not but be proud of her, while Hugh Bronx asserted that she was the very counterpart, in hull, rig and armament, of the Sea Siren.

The Sea Torch led the way out of the basin, saluted by the guns on the cliff, fired by signal officer Brent, who was left in command of the Bastile.

The Sea Sword followed close in her wake with Captain Bianca at the wheel, while the chief was acting as pilot for his vessel.

Hugh Bronx was alone in the cabin of the Sea Sword, and there remained until the vessels were two leagues distant from the island.

When called on deck he saw that the two schooners were sailing along under only jib and mainsail, and that the Sea Torch was leading, a cable's length ahead.

But then he observed that the sails on the Sea Sword were not kept full, as though she wished to keep her place astern.

"When we reach open water, Bronx, we will see if we cannot pass the Torch," said Captain Bianca, with a smile.

The crews of both vessels were in uniform—white pants, black shirts, and red skull-caps, and upon the front of the latter was a hand grasping a sword, while upon the caps of the Sea Torch was an emblem of a hand grasping a torch.

The officers were rigged out in their best, and Captain Bianca looked superb in his fine uniform and gem-studded sword-hilt and scabbard.

Over the deck of the Sea Torch floated her flag, a blue field, and in the center a black hand grasping a blazing torch.

The flag of the new schooner was a blue field with a red hand grasping a flaming torch.

In the four corners of each flag were the skull and cross-bones of the pirate.

"Ho! the Sea Sword!"

The hail came in the thunder tones of the buccaneer chief.

"Ay, ay, sir!" went back in Captain Bianca's loud voice, clear and musical.

"When we round the Bald Rock, I shall set all lower sails and beat dead to windward."

"You do the same, and see what your schooner can do with the Sea Torch."

"All right, sir," was the answer, and ten minutes after the Sea Torch rounded the Bald Rock.

Delighted with the sport, the men sprung to work, the single reef in the mainsail was shaken out, for the wind was blowing fresh; the foresail and fore staysail were set, and away darted the Sea Torch.

The Sea Sword rounded the rock with a rush, and the same sails were set by the time she was pointing into the eye of the wind, and she rushed on after her rival, now three cable-lengths ahead.

It was at once seen that the Sea Sword stood up better under the pressure than did the Sea Torch, and Captain Bianca said, proudly:

"Point her closer, quartermaster, and we will go right to windward of the Torch."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the long, needle-like bowsprit seemed to be pointing directly into the wind's eye.

"She is out-pointing us three points, and working ahead at that," said the old chief.

All watched with interest the sailing of the two beautiful vessels, and that the Sea Sword was a third faster under their present canvas and in half a gale, was evident, for she soon passed to windward of the Sea Torch.

"Ho, the Sea Sword!" thundered the chief, as she was going by.

"Ahoy, the Sea Torch."

"You can beat me on this line; but hoist all sail, to see what she will bear."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the flying jib and topsails were sent up.

Under this extra pressure the Sea Sword lay well over, but carried her canvas well, driving ahead like a race-horse, while the Sea Torch was compelled to at once lower her topsails, so far over did she reel under their pressure.

"She is a marvel," cried the chief, and then he signaled to sail away with the wind directly abeam.

This was done, and still the Sea Sword dropped the Sea Torch rapidly.

Another signal sent them flying away with the wind over the quarter, and with the same result as to speed, while dead before the wind, wing and wing, the Sea Torch appeared to be at anchor, so rapidly did her rival leave her.

"In a gale she can run away from a line-of-battle ship, I feel confident, but in a light breeze I am sure the Sea Torch will prove more than a match for her," the chief said to his officers.

As though to give the vessels a chance to test the truth of the chief's words, the wind began to lull in the afternoon, and soon dropped down to simply a balmy four knot breeze.

The Sea Torch had changed her course, and now headed so as to throw the Sea Sword far astern, at the same time signaling for Captain Bianca to come on.

Even with the light breeze, and though a mile astern at the start, the Sea Sword ran up to the Sea Torch and passed her within the hour, thus showing that the chief was wrong, and causing him to say, with an oath:

"In yonder craft I would defy the fleets of the world."

Having cast the log, and found thereby that the Sea Torch was doing splendidly, the chief ended the race at sunset by dipping his flag and firing a salute from each gun to the victor.

The Sea Sword promptly returned the salute, and shortening sail to gauge her speed with that of her rival, the two vessels headed northward upon their mission of death and destruction.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAPTAIN BIANCA'S RESOLVE.

THE two pirate schooners arrived off New York in good time, and not wishing to draw attention to their presence there, hauled down their outlaw colors, and sailed under the American flag.

From the skippers of various coasting vessels which they overhauled and hailed on their way out of New York Bay, they learned that the Sea Siren was not in port, and had not been seen there for five or six weeks.

One skipper said that he heard she was expected soon, however, and had sent in several prizes captured down east.

A brig from Boston was hailed, and she reported that the Sea Siren was cruising east as far as Portland, and had done good service there, but would be in Boston soon, to pick up her prize crews, and then come to New York.

"We must wait for her near New York, chief," said Captain Bianca to his father.

"Yes, that is our plan; but as she will not be on hand for some weeks or more, I shall cruise eastward and pick up a prize or two, that my men may not get rusty," said the old buccaneer.

"Do not go far beyond Montauk, and I will keep in the vicinity of Sandy Hook, and you know where to find me up the North Shrewsbury, if you do not sight me off-shore," was the reply.

"Don't be rash, my son, and trust yourself in New York City."

"That is just what I intend to do, for I will find out all I care to know about Moncrief and his vessel from the best authority."

With this the two schooners parted company, the Sea Sword running in after night-fall, rounded Sandy Hook, and sailing close under the Highlands of Navesink, sought an anchorage in a secure hiding-place in the North Shrewsbury River, a retreat Captain Bianca had often been to before, when cruising on his father's vessel.

"Basil," said Captain Bianca, calling that officer into his cabin, after the vessel was at anchor.

"Yes, captain."

"I wish you to take command, and to place a watch upon Bronx."

"If he attempts to go ashore check him."

"Yes, sir."

"If he attempts to escape, kill him."

"Yes, sir."

"See that he does not leave this vessel under any pretense."

"I will, sir."

"I am going to the city."

"It is risky."

"Our lives are full of risk; but I desire to find out all I can about this daring Captain Moncrief, and I can do so in New York."

"Yes, sir."

"I also have a desire to see this pretty cousin of mine."

"To see her?"

"Yes."

"But how can you?"

"I will take a horse and ride out to the farm, and—"

"But, sir, you will be known, and—"

"I shall go in disguise, Basil, but I shall go, that I am determined upon."

Basil shook his head, and Captain Bianca continued:

"You know my nature, so I shall go if I hang."

"I hope to be back day after to-morrow morning, but may be detained."

"Now order a boat out with sail and two of my picked men to run me up to Staten Island."

"They can put up at an inn there, and await my return, while I can run in the packet ferry up to the city."

Ten minutes after, the daring young buccaneer was on his way to the city.

Hugh Bronx had asked to accompany him, but had been refused, and it did not take long to prove to the Fugitive Privateersman that he was really a prisoner, and closely watched, though he was acting as second officer of the schooner.

It was after midnight some time, when the landlord of the Tarrylate Inn, at Staten Island, was aroused by a knock at his door.

He had just sunk into his first nap, but never grumbled at a chance to earn an honest shilling, so he turned out and called from his window:

"Well, who knocks?"

"Ho, landlord, I desire accommodations for myself and three men, and there is gold to be made," assured a voice below.

Landlord Van Gilt hastily robed himself and descended to the tap-room.

Opening the door cautiously, he saw an officer in uniform and two seamen.

"Enter, your honor, and good-night to you."

"Landlord, my men are to remain here, while I go to the city by the first ferry, to be gone perhaps for a couple of days."

"Yes, your honor."

"Have you a boat-house under lock and key?"

"I have that, your honor."

"I wish my boat put in there to await my return, and no curious eyes to see her."

"More, my men are to keep their room, and you are not to speak of their being here."

"Give them the best you have, and I will pay."

"Take this as an advance."

"Good Spanish gold," cried the delighted landlord, as he grasped several large pieces held out to him.

"Yes, and there is more for you upon my return, if you do as I ask."

"I'll do it, sir, indeed, I will, captain, for here is more than I take in in a week, and I do a big business too at the Tarrylate."

"I'll double what you have there when I return."

"Now get my boat into your boat-house."

This was soon done, and the key handed

to one of the seamen, at the request of the officer.

"When does the first ferry sail for the city?"

"The market boat goes up, sir, within the hour, from the ferry just above."

"All right, I'll go on that, and you will now show my men their room, give them supper and a bottle of wine, and then set me out a snack and a bottle of your best."

The landlord obeyed with alacrity, giving the seamen one of his best rooms overlooking the water, and setting before them a substantial supper, telling them he would serve them breakfast where they were, and bring it himself about nine o'clock.

Then he set out before Captain Bianca a tempting repast, with a bottle of wine that he knew was the very best.

Locking his door he walked to the ferry and saw his guest depart in the little sloop that was then one of the ferry-boats between New York and Staten Island.

"He pays like a prince, he does, and I will serve him well for gold," said Landlord Van Gilt, as he wended his way back to his inn, his curiosity excited as to who his strange guest could be.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HURST HAVEN'S GUEST.

It was a bleak winter afternoon, and flakes of snow were driven about upon the cold winds, and striking with stinging force the face of a horseman who drew rein at the massive gateway leading from the highway into the grounds of Hurst Haven.

It was about the sunset hour, and already gloom was settling upon the land, so that both horse and rider seemed willing to find a resting place for the night, which threatened to be very cold.

A broad, grand avenue, with majestic trees upon either side, led from the highway to the mansion, a quarter of a mile distant.

"There is comfort, if not luxury in that mansion, for it is a superb house," muttered the horseman.

"Now to see if hospitality is to be found in the heart of the master."

So saying the horseman urged his tired animal, for he seemed to have been hard ridden, into a canter, and soon drew rein at the door of the handsome house.

Instantly it was opened and a handsome man of fifty, with one arm only, stepped out upon the piazza.

It was Captain Norman Hurst, noble hearted, handsome, hospitable.

"Ah, sir, a bad night to be abroad, for we will have snow, I think."

"Dismount and come in, sir, for Hurst Haven is always ready to welcome a guest."

The cheery words of Skipper Hurst seemed to be appreciated by the horseman, who raised his cap, dismounted, threw his rein to a servant who just then appeared, and said:

"You are very kind, sir, and you anticipated my request to ask if I could get shelter for the night."

"I am Lieutenant Ravel, sir, of the American Navy, and I am on duty for my Government, in riding along the Atlantic shores of Long Island to discover all that I can from the fishermen and dwellers thereon, as to the inlets and harbors."

"Now I have introduced myself, and you know why I am here."

The young officer had spoken in a frank, pleasant manner, and Captain Hurst saw before him a tall, splendid form, enveloped in a cloak and wearing a naval uniform.

His face was bearded, and in strange contrast he wore a powdered wig, as was customary with many of that day.

He also wore gold spectacles, as though he suffered from near sightedness.

Struck by his appearance and frank manner, Captain Hurst replied:

"My name is Hurst, sir, and you are welcome to Hurst Haven."

"Come in, pray, and a servant shall show you to your room, after which please join us in the sitting-room."

Lieutenant Ravel followed the servant to a charming room, overlooking the basin, the timber-land and the distant sea, as he could see in the gathering darkness.

A bright fire had just been lighted upon the hearth, and looking about him the officer muttered:

"These are splendid quarters, that is certain."

Warming his cold hands and feet at the cheery fire, he soon made his toilet, and descended to the hall, where Captain Hurst met him, having heard him coming, and led him into the large and delightful sitting-room.

"A toddy with you, Lieutenant Ravel, to warm you up and give appetite for supper," said his host, leading him to the sideboard in the adjoining room, where all the necessary ingredients for the toddy were to be found.

Returning to the sitting-room the young officer fairly started at the vision of beauty he beheld there in the person of Sibyl Hurst.

"My daughter, Lieutenant Ravel," said the host.

Sibyl crossed the room in her frank way and extended her hand while she said pleasantly:

"I am glad to welcome Lieutenant Ravel."

The officer bowed low, and after a moment said:

"Captain Hurst, I think I have heard an old and dear friend of mine speak of you, and of your daughter."

"Indeed, and what is his name?"

"Moncrief."

Sibyl turned crimson, while her father said:

"Yes, Captain Moncrief is the dearest friend we have."

"And so you know him?"

"Yes, we served together some years ago; but I met him lately in New York."

"He is now East on a cruise, and with his usual daring and luck, is adding to his fame, for I learned that he has sent a number of prizes into Boston."

This praise of her lover quite won Sibyl over, and Manton Moncrief was talked of for some time, Lieutenant Ravel speaking of him in the highest terms.

At supper the guest proved himself a most entertaining person indeed, and afterward sang several songs, Spanish, French and English in a superb tenor voice, so that the captain and Sibyl were charmed.

When at last Sibyl retired for the night, leaving her father and the lieutenant sitting up over a decanter of rare old wine, the skipper became quite confidential and told his guest of the engagement of his daughter to Manton Moncrief, and that they were to be married on Christmas, hardly two weeks away, should he keep his promise to return then.

"He will return, never fear, if alive," said Lieutenant Ravel.

Then the skipper told all the history of their meeting Moncrief, and afterward the two talked over the coast, its bays and inlets, and Captain Hurst gave his guest a great deal of valuable information on this score.

When the skipper arose the next morning he found his guest already out enjoying the crisp air, and taking in the scenery from the piazza.

Sibyl met them at breakfast, and after the meal was over the skipper showed his guest down to the basin, pointed out the inlet, and told him that there was water enough for a line-of-battle ship to anchor in, could she run in through the dangerous channel.

Lieutenant Ravel was easily persuaded to remain to dinner, but afterward took his departure, promising to call upon his way back to the city.

"Well, Sibyl, we have had a very pleasant visit," remarked the skipper, after the departure of his guest.

"Yes, father, and he is most entertaining, exceedingly well educated, and very courtly in his manners; but I do wish he would shave off that horrid beard and stop wearing those old spectacles, as I believe, otherwise, he would be handsome," replied Sibyl, while she added:

"But he is a man who will command respect, and I like him immensely."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ADMIRAL AND THE CAPTAIN.

Down Broadway in New York City, wending his way toward the Battery, was a fine-looking old gentleman, with white locks and a distinguished air.

He was dressed in the uniform of an admiral in the American Navy of that day, and

his step and face showed that he did not feel his years.

Suddenly he stopped, raised a pair of eyeglasses to his eyes, and turned them upon a person who was approaching him at a leisurely step.

"Bless my soul! it is you, then, Moncrief?"

The admiral halted and held out his hand, while the young officer flushed, and for an instant seemed confused, as though he would prefer not to have been recognized.

But he grasped the old gentleman's hand, and replied, pleasantly:

"Yes, admiral, I am back again."

"And glad am I to see you, my son, for there is no young officer of our navy, ay, or old officer, either, for that matter, that renders more service to our cause than do you."

"You are kind to say so, admiral; but I feel I do not merit such high praise."

"You merit all I say, and you have done well on your cruise, though I did not expect you back for a week yet."

"No, sir, I am ahead of my appointed time somewhat, but—"

"But why did you not report?"

"The truth is, sir, I but just now arrived, and—"

"I forgive you, and I suppose you were anxious to get back and see the fair Siren of the Sea, who, you told me, was to become your wife about this time."

"On Christmas, admiral."

"Ah, a good day for a wedding."

"And I shall expect you to be there, admiral, if I may hope for that honor, for I can take you to Hurst Haven in the Sea Siren, and you will find it a grand old home, while Captain Hurst is an epicure, lives like a prince, and more, has some of the finest wines I ever drank."

"Egad, you draw a picture that tempts me, my son, and I shall be glad to go, if only to see you launched upon the sea of matrimony, and to wish you *bon voyage*."

"Thank you, admiral."

"But how many prizes did you take on your eastern cruise?"

"I shall render my reports, sir, in full in a few days; but now I merely ran into port for fresh water and provisions, as I have an engagement at sea as soon as I can get there."

"Ah! you have something on hand, I see."

"Yes, sir; I heard that Bianca, the Buccaneer, in his famous schooner the Sea Torch, was cruising off Sandy Hook."

"I learned it from a vessel he robbed, that I hailed off Boston Light, so I gave up the idea of going into Boston Harbor, and ran for this port, *via* Long Island Sound."

"As soon as I fill my water-casks, and get some provisions, I shall run out to-night without lights, and try and come upon this sea terror."

"Moncrief, you will do it?"

"I hope so, sir."

"Capture that pest of the ocean, and I verily believe you will be made a commodore, young as you are."

"I shall try to do so."

"Do you need any more men?"

"No, sir; I have ample force."

"Is there aught I can do for you?"

"Nothing, sir, I thank you."

"Well, you shall have a month's leave for your honeymoon, anyhow, and if you capture the Sea Torch I will do all I can to have you made a commodore; but I will not detain you longer," and with many good wishes and a warm grasp of the hand, the old admiral parted with the gallant young officer, calling back to him:

"Remember, I am to go with you, Christ-mas!"

"I will not forget, admiral," and the young officer walked briskly on, his pace in great contrast to his leisurely gait when he was met by his superior officer.

"I would not have met him for a great deal; but now it is over I am very glad of it," muttered the young captain as he walked along.

Going into different stores he made a number of purchases, and passing by the market he bought a quantity of fresh meats and vegetables, ordering all to be sent to a certain pier at once.

Arriving at the pier himself half an hour after, he found the things had arrived, and

calling to a sailor near, he had them placed in his boat, which was pretty well loaded down.

Springing into the stern-sheets, he gave the order to the four oarsmen to "give way," and the boat moved rapidly away over the waters just as the declining sun touched the Jersey hills.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A PIRATE'S GIFT.

LANDLORD VAN GILT, of the Tarrylate Inn, devoted himself most thoroughly to his two sailor guests.

He gave them four meals a day, and wine that was certainly excellent, with cigars to smoke from his own private stock.

There were fish, game and fresh meats in abundance, with all the delicacies that could be placed before them.

"I say, Jack, I don't mind if ther cap'n stays away a month," said one, when the landlord brought them in a ten o'clock supper, the evening of the first day of their stay at the Tarrylate Inn.

"Nor I, Mate Ben, fer this is fit fer a king," was the reply.

"The cap'n is a great gent fer a pirit, Mate Jack."

"He's a prince, Ben, is he?"

"He don't fear Old Nick, does he?"

"No, he don't; but I'm glad we is aboard with him, and not with the old chief."

"So is I, mate."

"The old man is a red devil, hain't he?"

"When he gits mad he's a hurricane."

"He's good to the lads, but he's cruel if he thinks he's got reason."

"And the young cap'n are dangerous to r'ile."

"He is, fer a fact; but, mate, don't that schooner, Sea Sword, beat all?"

"She does, and no mistake."

"I believe we can drop the Sea Siren schooner they talks so much about."

"Maybe, mate; but I kinder fears thet cap'n o' the Sea Siren."

"Mate, you speaks my sentiments, and when we meets the Sea Siren, I hopes as the Sea Torch will be on hand to help us, for thet young American cap'n hain't one to whip, they do tell me."

So the two sailors discoursed together, both more than pleased with their dwelling-place, and caring little for their forced confinement in the room, so accustomed were they to close quarters on board ship.

The day and night passed away, and a second day was begun in their retreat.

But there was no falling off in the attention of Host Van Gilt.

They had a roaring log fire, and other logs ready to pile on when necessary.

Their room looked out from one window upon the upper bay, the green shores of Bay Ridge and the distant town.

Another window gave them a view through the Narrows and far out to sea, with the shores of Staten Island, here and there dotted with houses.

They could see vessels at anchor, and vessels in motion, of all kinds and sizes, with one or two stately men-of-war.

The close of the third day was near at hand and still their captain came not, and the two seamen began to feel some anxiety regarding him.

"The cap'n is one to take keer o' himself, Mate Jack."

"Yes, Ben, but then he are over time due, and I feel a leetle anxious," replied the other.

A tempting supper allayed their fears however for awhile, and they were enjoying their pipes, and gazing into the fire of blazing logs, when a quick rap sounded upon the door.

Ben opened it, and his face lighted up with pleasure as he saw Captain Bianca.

"Back ag'in, cap'n, sir, and we is glad to see yer, for we was a trifle anxious regardin' yer safety," said the seaman.

"I thank you, lads, for your kind thoughts of me; but I am back again, and within the hour we must be off."

"The tap-room is full, and so I told the landlord that I would take my supper right here, and then we will start."

"Yes, sir, we is ready."

"No word has been sent up from the schooner?"

"No, sir."

"I hope all is well there; but I have learned that the Sea Siren got word of us, from some vessel that we hailed, and whose skipper recognized the Sea Torch, and I believe Moncrief is now on the hunt for the chief."

"He'll catch a Tartar, sir."

"Yes, but I wish to be on hand to see that he does not catch a Tartar," was the smiling reply.

"It is safer to fight that American cap'n double, sir."

"It certainly is just now, though I think I would like to match him some day craft for craft; but here comes the landlord, and I hope he has treated you well?"

"Let the lads speak, your honor, as it is unbecoming in me to sing my own praise," said Host Van Gilt, as he set the tray of supper down upon the table.

"If we'd been yourself, sir, he couldn't have done more for us," said Ben.

"We've lived on the best, sir," Jack added.

"A good recommendation, surely."

"Now, landlord, give the lads another bottle between them, for it is a chilly night, and then add up your score."

Landlord Van Gilt was a shrewd host, and besides, like all hotel-keepers he was a good judge of human nature.

So he said, blandly:

"But, sir, your honor, you paid me in advance."

He knew that he had been paid thrice as much as he would ever have dared to charge.

"That was to gain your good-will, landlord."

"Oh, your honor."

"I hope often to come and see you, and when I do I wish to feel that I can get from you all I pay for."

"You can, your honor."

"I am a man that hates show, avoids crowds, and what I do I wish to go quietly about."

"Yes, sir, yes."

"Now, if I come again, I wish you to know me."

"I could never forget you, sir."

"Some time I might look different from what I do now, and maybe I might send a friend, or one of my lads here."

"Your friends are all welcome, your honor."

"Well, in case I should come, and you should not know me, or a friend should come, or one of my lads here, I wish to show you how you would know them."

"I have on board my vessel a couple of men most skilled in the work of goldsmiths, and it was my fancy to have them make me up some trinkets like this."

He took from his pocket as he spoke a trinket of rare workmanship.

It was a hand grasping a sword.

The hand and wrist were set in rubies, so that it was red, and a gantlet of emeralds went back from the wrist, while the sword was of gold, and, studded in the guard of the hilt were diamond letters, reading:

"SEA."

"It is beautiful and costly, your honor," said Landlord Van Gilt, admiringly.

"Yes, it is quite valuable, but I intend it as a gift to you."

Landlord Van Gilt fairly staggered, as he cried:

"To me, sir?"

"Yes."

"But, your honor—"

"Here, landlord, let me pin this on your scarf."

"Do not say where you got it, or speak of it, in fact, unless forced to do so, and then say that a sailor gave it to you for his board, for I do not intend to pay you for my accommodations."

"I am more than paid, your honor."

"And, landlord, when any one comes to you and shows you a match for this pin, just treat him as you would me, keep any secret he may tell you, serve him as he may ask, and he will have gold to pay you tenfold."

"Oh, your honor!"

"You will do this, then?"

"I will, your honor, upon the word of a Van Gilt."

"Then the pin is yours, and he who shows the match of it is my friend. Remember!"

"Now let me pay you for my men's accommodation."

"Here is a little bag of gold, and it contains just fifty guineas."

"Oh, Lord!"

"Take it, Landlord Van Gilt, and remember, when you serve me, or mine, you get good pay."

"Now for that wine for the lads, and then we must be off, for I shall at once attack my supper."

Landlord Van Gilt darted from the room.

He was in an ecstasy of delight, and seemed taller and stouter as he entered his tap-room with the valuable gift in his hand.

The two seamen got a bottle each of the best, and a lunch, with several bottles of rare old wine, was gotten ready to put in the boat.

Then the landlord escorted his guests to their boat, and soon after the young pirate was wrapped in his cloak and sleeping soundly, as the stanch boat held on her way back to the schooner, while Jack held the helm, Captain Bianca saying that he had had little sleep during his absence.

"Sail ho, cap'n!" suddenly said Ben, who was on the lookout.

In an instant Bianca was up, and there, coming right toward them was a small boat with a leg-of-mutton sail.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A TRAITOR'S DOOM.

THE boat that was coming toward Bianca, did not swerve from its course, so either had not sighted the enemy, or cared not for them.

But, when within a few cables' length, a movement was seen on board, the sail was trimmed in quickly, for she was going before the wind, and she went about in a hurry.

But the craft that Bianca was in was like the schooner she belonged to, very fleet, and began to gain upon the other rapidly.

The pursued tried different ways of sailing, hoping to throw the pursuer off, but all to no use, for the pirate boat swiftly gained.

Soon they were near enough to hail, and Captain Bianca said:

"Lads, I would not have chased that fellow had he not run from me; but his running makes him appear guilty, so we will find out what he is."

Then he added:

"You hail, Jack, and say we are a Harbor Guard boat."

"Ay, ay, sir," and Jack's deep voice was heard:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came the response.

"What boat is that?"

"We are on our way to the city; who are you?"

"A Harbor Guard boat."

"Ay, ay, then I wish to see you, for I have news of importance."

"Lay to then, and we will run alongside," said Jack.

"That was the voice of Hugh Bronx, lads, or I am greatly mistaken," said Captain Bianca.

"It did seem kinder familiar like," Ben responded.

In a few moments more the two boats lay side by side, and a voice in the pursued fairly groaned:

"Great God! it is the schooner's cutter with Captain Bianca."

"Yes, Bronx, you are right, and because I rowed away from the schooner you did not expect to see us under sail."

"Which way?"

"I was going to the city."

"With whose permission?"

"I asked none."

"Ah! who have you there with you?"

"Coxswain Folsom."

"And who gave you leave of absence from the ship, sir?"

"Lieutenant Bronx, sir."

"Lieutenant Basil was in command, my man."

"But both of you return with me, so get into this boat."

"You come first, coxswain."

The coxswain obeyed sullenly, and at an order from Captain Bianca he was seized and bound by the two seamen.

"Now what boat is that?"

"One we picked up on the shore," said Bronx.

"Get in now, sir, and set your boat adrift."

Bronx obeyed in silence and the cutter went flying along on her way to join the schooner.

Running around the base of the highlands she stood on up the Shrewsbury to the North Branch and was alongside of the Sea Sword a little before two o'clock.

Basil was on deck and promptly hailed.

"All right, Basil, I am glad to see you awake; but how is it that you allowed two men to escape?"

"Captain Bianca, Lieutenant Bronx feigned sickness and was in his state-room at supper time."

"I left Coxswain Folsom on watch forward, and Bronx slipped to the deck through the steerage, came it over Folsom in some way and the two slipped overboard together."

"This is a clear statement, Basil, and I exonerate you from all blame in the matter."

"Now search the coxswain."

This was done and a thousand dollars were found upon him.

"This shows that he was bribed, for his prize money is here in gems, sir, as you always pay the men," said Basil, showing a small bag of precious stones, worth several hundred dollars.

"Mr. Bronx, you will have to be searched," said Bianca.

"This is an indignity, sir, and—"

"You will submit gracefully, or I shall fell you to the deck with a blow of my sword and then search you!"

Hugh Bronx knew his man and handed out his valuables.

They were his own money, and what he had received from poor Bessie, along with her necklace and bracelets.

The thousand dollars given him by Rossmore he had given to Coxswain Folsom, with a promise of more and an officer's position upon his vessel.

"Mr. Bronx, you have deceived me, but as I need you as a pilot I shall keep you."

"You are to resume duty at once, sir, so call the men to witness execution."

"Sir!" gasped Hugh Bronx, in an agony of fear.

"You heard my orders, sir; obey them!"

"But who is to be executed, sir?"

"The traitor whom I can spare from on board this ship."

"Coxswain Folsom?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Captain Bianca, I beg you to spare him!"

"Do as I order you, or I shall give the command to Basil, and two executions will follow."

"I obey, sir," said Bronx, quickly, and nervously he issued the orders, while Captain Bianca turned to the traitor seaman and said:

"Coxswain, you were on duty as guard over that man, accepted a bribe, and I allow no traitors under my command."

"Make your peace with your Maker, if you can, for you have but five minutes to live."

"Mercy, Captain Bianca—mercy!"

The man groaned the words, and unheeding them, Bianca entered his cabin.

In a few moments the low, muffled roll of a drum called him on deck, and he found all ready to swing the traitor up into mid-air.

Coxswain Folsom lay upon the deck, for though he had faced death a hundred times, his limbs now refused to support him, and he was moaning piteously.

The crew stood in silence looking on, and eight seamen held one end of the rope, ready to hoist the doomed man into eternity.

"All ready, sir," said Hugh Bronx, in a voice that quivered.

"Then do your duty, sir," was the stern reply.

In tones hardly audible, Hugh Bronx called out:

"Ready, there, execution guard!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

The reply came promptly in chorus.

"Haul away! all together!"

With a "Heave yo!" the men hauled hand over hand, and as a shriek left the lips of the traitor, he was swung high up above the decks.

"All hands to make sail."

"Up with that anchor!" called out Cap.

tain Bianca, in a voice that was free from all excitement, when he had waited, what seemed to all an age, for the man's struggles to cease.

The men sprung to their work, the dead body was cut down and cast overboard, and the pretty schooner moved out from her retreat in the cove and catching the breeze as she shot out from the land's shelter, headed toward the lower bay, and thence around Sandy Hook into deep water.

"We are all clear now, and we must find the Sea Torch, Basil, for I fear for her safety, as it is rumored that the Sea Siren is on her track," said Captain Bianca to his lieutenant, as the vessel left the Sandy Hook Light astern.

"I hope we may come up with the Sea Torch, sir, before the Sea Siren does, for Captain Moncrief is a terrific fighter," responded Basil.

"Yes, I hope so, so keep bright watch," and Bianca entered the cabin, leaving Basil in charge and Hugh Bronx leaning over the taffrail with the air of a man who had been completely stunned by some great blow.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BIANCA'S BOLD GAME.

BIANCA THE BUCCANEER was at all times a dangerous man.

He seemed to know not what fear was, and since he had turned Algerine corsair, a score or more years before, he knew that his neck was legally in the hangman's noose.

He had taken to piracy in American waters, as more suited to his tastes, and had found the island that was his retreat, by capturing a small coast pilot who gave him the secret for his life.

With this Gibraltar the old pirate had set out to found his fortune, with the aid of his schooner the Sea Torch.

He was ambitious to win in the world, and to do so felt that he must become a pirate corsair commodore.

By degrees he began to accumulate vessels, add to his booty, increase his force, get guns and fire-arms, so that when the time came he could get the proper vessels for his outlaw fleet.

His idea was to get three fleet schooners, one of them his flag-ship, one under his son, and the third to be commanded by Basil.

With these he would have the means of enriching himself rapidly, add to his strength, and be what he longed to become, a buccaneer commodore.

The reader has seen how well his plans turned out, as far as his putting the Sea Torch in perfect trim, building the Sea Sword, and having his stronghold strengthened.

His fleet would be all he could desire when he captured the Sea Siren, and it was with a hopeful heart he sailed forth to hunt the cruiser down.

So confident did he feel that the Sea Sword could outsail the Sea Siren, that he came to the conclusion that the Sea Torch was a match in speed for Moncrief's cruiser, and also could defeat her in a fair combat.

He would have liked to capture the Sea Siren without the aid of the Sea Sword, for the old pirate was vain of his prowess, and so sailed to the eastward hoping to fall in with his enemy.

He had another idea in view, and that was to land at Hurst Haven and pay his brother a visit.

His hatred for his elder brother had only increased with years, and even toward him dead, as he had believed him.

But when he found him living, he was more bitter than ever, and vowed to take his life.

He knew that he dared not go back to England to claim the title and wealth going with Norman-Hurst Castle, but with his elder brother, Norman, dead, and his brother Rafael dead, for he had heard of his being slain in battle in foreign lands, and leaving no heir, then his son, Rafael Bianca would be the inheritor.

He would get the title and the wealth, and this would be balm to the old pirate next to his doing so himself.

"I have every proof that Rafael is my son, and the next heir, and no one knows me as a pirate, or him, and he can take proof of my death, for it is easy enough for me to

pretend to be dead, and then he can claim his own.

"With his rank and estates there, and the riches I can give him, my son will be the wealthiest man in England.

"But I must first get rid of my brother, Norman, and that girl of his.

"I will go to his home and he must die, while she shall marry Rafael, my son.

"That will settle it all as I wish."

Such was the grand game of old Bianca, and he imparted it to his son.

But the young man at once said that he should not visit Hurst Haven then.

"Let us capture Moncrief, get him out of the way, and then I will go to Hurst Haven and look matters over, and then we can decide."

Old Bianca had a will of iron, but somehow he was ruled by his handsome, quiet son, and he yielded.

"Give me Bronx as an officer," he had said, after yielding.

"No, father, for you are one to yield to temptation, and with Bronx on board, who could run you to an anchorage near Hurst Haven, you would surely go there."

The old pirate laughed, and then replied:

"Have your way, my son, but Norman Hurst has got to die, come what may."

"Well, we will arrange that afterward," was the reply.

And so the father and son parted, the young captain to go to a hiding-place near the Highlands of Navesink, and then up to the city, as the reader has seen, and the old chief to sail eastward along the Long Island Coast, in the hope of picking up prizes, and really anxious to meet the Sea Siren and conquer her alone with the Sea Torch, that he might thus add to his fame.

His desire to meet the Sea Siren was gratified, as will soon be revealed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MONCRIEF'S REQUEST.

THE Sea Siren was returning from her cruise eastward, and a most successful one it had been, too.

She had been as far as off Halifax, and the result of the cruise had raised the spirits of all on board, and the speed shown by their beautiful vessel and her weatherly qualities had won the devoted love of all on board for the new schooner.

As the Sea Siren neared Boston Harbor, one pleasant afternoon, a vessel was sighted, crowding on all sail for port.

A signal was also set to attract the attention of the lookout on the schooner, and the Sea Siren at once headed to meet her.

"Brig ahoy!"

It was Moncrief who hailed as soon as he came near the brig.

"Is that an American cruiser?" was the response.

"Yes, the American schooner Sea Siren, Manton Moncrief, commander."

A cheer was heard on the brig which at once luffed into the wind, and with a skillful movement the schooner ran up under her stern.

"I was hailed off Sandy Hook by an armed schooner, while another was in company with her, very much such a craft as yours.

"They asked about the Sea Siren, whether she was in New York Harbor, or not, and professed to be American cruisers, but were not."

"Ay, ay, sir, what were they?"

"I recognized one as the Sea Torch, and I saw Captain Bianca on her deck."

"Aha! I thank you, sir."

"I was a prisoner on the Sea Torch once for a month, Bianca having captured and burned my vessel, but I knew the vessel, though she has undergone changes in hull and rig since then, and the buccaneer chief I surely recognized."

"I am very much indebted to you, captain, and I will run into Boston and get my crew off of my prizes, for I have but half force."

"Then I will go in search of the Sea Torch, and will find her, too."

"Good-day and again, thank you."

So saying Moncrief gave orders for the Sea Siren to put away for Boston, and the brig, a swift sailer, was already on her way.

But seeing the schooner coming up rapidly, the skipper of the brig crowded on all

sail, anxious to show what his vessel could do.

"Why, that cruiser sails like a bird."

"See! she has not set her topsails and yet will run by us," cried the captain of the brig.

The topsails of the Sea Siren were soon set, also a flying jib, and the beautiful vessel fairly flew by the brig, to the amazement of all on board the merchantman, who had not believed it possible for their vessel to be out-sailed with such ease.

"Yes, he'll catch the buccaneer, there is no doubt of that, and, from the name he bears he will capture him, too," the brig's skipper said.

And on into port went the Sea Siren, leaving the merchantman far astern, and running past the inbound coasters as though they were anchored.

It was nightfall when she dropped anchor, while about her were her prizes, and telling Rossmore what he desired done, Moncrief went ashore to report to the commandant of the port.

That personage sat in his handsome quarters, stern and pompous-looking, and had given orders to admit no one else on business that night.

"The commandant cannot see you, sir," said the guard on duty.

"It is most important."

"I have his orders, sir."

"Will you not say to him that Captain Moncrief, of the schooner-of-war Sea Siren, desires to see him upon a matter of importance?"

The name acted as a talisman, for the guard knew it well, and he glanced admiringly at the young sailor, as he bowed low and replied:

"I feel that he will see you, sir."

"Get out, if you bring any business message!" cried the commandant, who was suffering with gout.

"Captain Moncrief, sir, of the Sea Siren, sir, wishes to see you," ventured the guard, emphasizing the name.

"Aha! eh? what? that young devil of the sea?"

"Show him in, sir, show him in at once, and don't keep him waiting, you uniformed idiot!" roared the commandant.

The guard disappeared with alacrity, and said:

"His excellency will see you, Captain Moncrief, and I am happy, sir, very happy, in having met you."

Moncrief thanked the obsequious guard and entered the room of the commandant.

"My dear Moncrief, I am happy, so happy."

"Be seated, and there is wine and a glass, and here liquor and cigars—help yourself and excuse my not rising, for my old enemy the gout has me in its clutch."

The commandant and Moncrief had met several times before, on one occasion when the old officer had been blown out to sea in a small cutter, when overtaken in the harbor by a storm.

A British schooner had captured the little cutter, with ail on board, and had hardly had time to secure her valuable prisoners when Moncrief's schooner, then a privateer, had hove in sight, engaged the Englishman, and forced him to strike his flag, thus rescuing the prisoners and capturing a valuable prize.

The commandant had never forgotten this, and he had watched the career of the young man since.

Being in command of the fort, the prizes sent in by the Sea Siren had been reported to him, and he was anxious to congratulate the young sailor.

"You have had a splendid cruise, Moncrief."

"Yes, commandant, I have done well, sir."

"Let me see—six prizes you have sent in?"

"Seven, with one that should have been here yesterday, sir."

"Aha! yes; a clipper ship, two brigs, a barkatine, a Halifax coaster, and—and—"

"A Halifax and St. John's packet schooner and the cruiser."

"The cruiser?"

"Yes, sir, I ran across a small armed brig that tried to drive me away from the St. John's packet schooner, and I went into action with him."

"Doubtless you were superior in tonnage and guns, too?"

"About equal in tonnage and crew, sir, but my battery was by far superior."

"And he struck to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a marvel, Moncrief!"

"Thank you, commandant; but I ran into port to ask a favor of you."

"Granted, of course."

"There is no cruiser in port?"

"Yes, an old brig-of-war."

"I was anxious to send my prizes on to New York, by the way of Long Island Sound, and thought if you had a cruiser in port that would convoy them there, sending her crew on each vessel, it would be a great favor."

"And you?"

"I learned this afternoon that Bianca the Buccaneer and a consort schooner are off New York Harbor, watching for prizes."

"The skipper said they were under the American flag, but he recognized the Sea Torch, as well as old Bianca himself, and he asked where my vessel was."

"I see—I see; and you wish to let him know?"

"Yes, sir."

"You shall do it."

"My schooner is in fine trim, for we suffered little in our action with the Englishman; but I desire to collect my men, sent in on the different prizes, and that will make me fully manned, while the little captured fleet can be convoyed to New York by the cruiser now in your port."

"It shall be as you wish, Moncrief, and the old armed tub now here is good for little else."

"They can sail early and get into the Sound with all dispatch, where they will be safe."

"I thank you, sir."

"Don't thank me, for it is your due, and I wish we had more like you."

"You will capture that pirate, I am sure, and hang him up at once."

"I will send for one of my staff to go at once on board the brig-of-war, and give her captain orders to aid you as you desire."

After a stay of half an hour longer, Moncrief left the headquarters accompanied by a staff officer, and visiting the cruiser, her commander at once said he would place a working crew on each prize and convey them to New York.

Early the next morning the prize crews from the Sea Siren were called on board, and the fleet vessel, in splendid fighting trim, sailed out of Boston Harbor under clouds of canvas, while the brig-of-war followed slowly, convoying the seven captured vessels to their destination.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CRUISER AND THE CORSAIR.

ON a starboard tack the Sea Siren had stood in toward Long Island Sound, until her sharp bows were on a line between the easterly end of Fisher's Island, and the bleak, bald hills of Montauk Point.

She had gone about on the port tack, and was heading out into the Atlantic, with Montauk on her starboard beam, and not half a league distant, when the lookout aloft sung out in a voice that showed he had made a discovery that was important:

"Sail ho! Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay, my man, I see her," responded Allen Rossmore, who was upon deck in charge, and he immediately leveled his glass at the stranger, which was coming into view a league off Montauk Point, and with the wind astern.

"Ask Captain Moncrief to come on deck," said Rossmore quickly, addressing a midshipman.

"Ay, ay, sir," and the middy bounded down the cabin companionway with an alacrity that showed he had an idea that he bore an important message.

"Well, Rossmore?" and Moncrief came on deck.

"We have sighted our man, sir," was the quiet response, delivered though with an air of suppressed joy.

As he spoke he handed his glass to Moncrief.

One glance, and Captain Moncrief cried:

"The Sea Torch!"

"Yes, sir."

"They evidently see us?"

"I should think so, sir."

"Then he either means to fight, or has confidence in the speed of his vessel."

"I think both, sir, for the Sea Torch is a trifle larger than the Siren, and Bianca would not be so bold as to hover between New York and Boston, unless he had a very large crew and felt that he could whip an ordinary foe, English or American or could run from what he was afraid of."

"I guess you are right, Rossmore, and I am glad we have found our man."

"Shall I have the men called to quarters?"

"No, not yet, for he is four miles away and there is ample time."

"Let us see what he means to do first."

The Sea Siren had been standing straight out to sea, on a course that would carry her across the bows of the Sea Torch and about a league ahead of her.

If the Sea Torch should decide to fight, she would hold the advantage of being to windward of her enemy, as she was then coming along wing and wing, and at a splendid burst of speed.

There was no doubt but that the pirates had discerned the Sea Siren, for her decks were seen to be crowded with men; but all doubt was removed when the Sea Siren was crossing her bows, as she suddenly jibed her mainsail to port, and swept around until running parallel with the cruiser.

At the same time the crew were seen taking in topsails and flying jib and leaving her under fighting canvas.

There was a six-knot breeze blowing, and the sea was not rough, so that all was very favorable for a combat.

"I wish we had a little more daylight, Rossmore," said Moncrief, glancing toward the sun which was near the horizon.

"It would be better, if he intends to make a hard fight, sir."

"Well, up with our colors, show the Sea Siren at the foe and let him have our long range compliments."

The men had all gone to quarters, stripped for the fray, and few orders were necessary to that perfectly trained crew.

The American colors went up to the peak and fluttered out on the breeze, while up to the fore went a flag with a blue field, in the center of which was embroidered in gold an eye of gold.

As the two flags were shaken loose, the splendid bow pivot of the Sea Siren sent a shot flying over the Sea Torch.

It was evidently a surprise to the buccaneers to see that the gun had such a long range; but they answered quickly by running up the buccaneer's flag, and returning the fire with a broadside.

The shot of the pirate all fell short, and going about quickly, as though on a pivot, he headed shoreward, firing his other broadside as he did so.

The Sea Siren also went about, and as she pointed closer, to bring her nearer to the Sea Torch, it was seen that with even less sail set, she was forging rapidly ahead.

The buccaneer chief seemed to realize also that his vessel was being outsailed, and he opened rapidly with his starboard battery, evidently anxious to cripple his foe.

But the range seemed too great, while the Sea Siren replied slowly and steadily to tell with every shot, for no finer battery was on any vessel than that which Moncrief had fitted out his schooner with, and, as the reader will remember, had mounted them in such a way that each gun was serviceable for both broadsides.

The pirate did not seem to like this much, and began to let his vessel fall off a few points to bring the two more rapidly nearer, but the Sea Siren opened so rapidly and fiercely that the outlaws felt the pace was getting too hot for them, and suddenly the Sea Torch put about and started on a run in a dead beat to windward.

This Bianca the buccaneer knew to be the best sailing point of his vessel, and, as darkness was near, he hoped to be able to keep out of range for he remarked:

"The devil will sink us before we get near enough to hurt him, so it is no fight between us until the Sea Sword is in it also."

Seeing the pirate turn to fly, Moncrief knew the reason, that he feared damage to

his vessel at long range; but he smiled grimly and said:

"Now, Captain Bianca, you simply have to take the fire of our longest range gun, and if it does not bring you to close quarters and hand-to-hand work, I am vastly mistaken."

Having started in flight the Sea Torch was seen to set all the sail she could beat to windward with and, by short tacks she was doing splendid work.

But, to the chagrin and dread of the buccaneer chief, the Sea Siren followed in his wake, and without setting a stitch more canvas began to creep up on him in fine style, while her slow, steady fire from her bow pivot, the Lady Sibyl, as the gunner had named his piece, was telling at every shot on life, spars and canvas.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

"This is getting interesting now, Rossmore," said Moncrief, as the fire from the Sea Torch's stern guns began to fly about the Sea Siren, here and there killing or wounding a seaman, splintering a spar or gashing a sail.

"Yes, captain, but the pirate is our game, and he might as well strike his colors and end this bloodshed."

Moncrief laughed, and replied:

"He prefers death by iron rather than hemp."

"That is so."

"And his men are of the same opinion."

"Doubtless."

"Were we at close quarters he would give us a good fight, but as it is he must yield in the end, for if I cannot make him strike with my guns, I shall carry him by boarding."

"I hope we will not have to injure his vessel very much, for she is certainly a beauty."

"Yes, and I ordered the gunner to fire to rake the deck, or hit high, so as not to hurt his hull."

"But night is upon us."

"Yes, sir, and we gain more rapidly as the dew moistens our sails."

"You are right, Rossmore."

The two vessels were now going dead to windward by short tacks, following along the Long Island Coast.

The starboard tack would carry them within half a mile of the shore, and the port tack run them out half a league to sea.

"That fellow seems anxious to hug the coast," said Rossmore.

"He does indeed, and all these sea outlaws like to fight near shore, as it affords them a chance to escape, if not pressed too close; but we must press that fellow hard."

The Sea Siren was steadily gaining on the Sea Torch, following closely her every tack, but each time outpointing her, so that she lessened the distance between them readily.

The pirate was firing hotly from his two stern guns, and now and then in going about it yawed around far enough to give the cruiser a broadside.

The Sea Siren was firing steadily, and each shot seemed to tell upon the outlaw.

That the buccaneer was suffering equally, was evident, but the Sea Siren was also getting her share of wounded, though they were not serious to the schooner or her rig, telling more upon the crew.

"We must close this, Rossmore, for I am losing some good men."

"Set more sail, and we'll walk alongside of that fellow."

At this command of the captain, his lieutenant issued his orders, the working crew sprung to their posts, and the extra canvas was speedily set.

Under its pressure the Sea Siren fairly jumped ahead, and seeing it, and that half an hour would bring her alongside, Captain Bianca allowed his vessel to yaw often, that he might pour a broadside into his pursuer.

But this did not check the advance of the Sea Siren, and the Sea Torch put about on her starboard tack without running her usual distance off from the shore.

The cruiser followed at once, and her fire became more rapid.

As the Sea Torch neared the shore, seeming to stand closer in than was usual, Moncrief gave orders to luff sharp and give the pirate a broadside.

The effect seemed to stagger the pirate, but he held on as before.

"Give him your starboard broadside again," shouted Moncrief.

"Luff sharp, helmsman!"

"Steady as you are!"

"Ready at the guns there!"

"Fire!"

The cruiser reeled under the shock, and the glare of her guns blinded the eyes of the crew for a moment, though they heard the crash of timbers, cries and curses.

Then the pirate was seen lying to, and a cheer broke from the cruiser's men.

On swept the Sea Siren, and in ten minutes was within hailing distance of her foe.

The pirate was seen drifting, a wreckage hanging over her bows, and her foretopmast shot away.

"Ahoy the pirate!" cried Moncrief.

"Ahoy the Sea Siren!"

The response came back in a deep, sullen voice.

"Have you struck your black flag?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I wish Captain Bianca to come aboard my vessel."

"Captain Bianca was seriously wounded, sir."

"All right; I will run down and board you."

The Sea Siren now ran to windward, and soon, under shortened sail, came gently alongside the pirate.

The scene of death and destruction on board was fearful.

Four of the guns of the Sea Torch had been dismounted, her bowsprit had been shot away, the wreckage hanging over the bows, her topmast was swinging aloft held by the stays, the bulwarks were gashed badly, the decks torn and many dead and dying were lying from fore-castle to quarter-deck.

Those of the crew who were able, stood in a group amidships, sullen and silent.

With a bound, followed by his boarders, Moncrief had sprung upon the pirate deck, and stood gazing about him upon the scene of ruin and death.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TRICKERY.

THE pirates gazed with admiration, mingled with dread, upon their captor, for his name had long been known to them.

The battle lanterns lighted up the deck, and Moncrief saw the men grouped together, but no officers.

"Where is the officer in command?" he asked, sternly.

"No one commands here now, sir, but you," said a sailor, stepping forward and saluting politely.

"You said your chief was wounded when I hailed?"

"Yes, sir, he got hit pretty badly."

"Who is his next officer?"

"The chief was not given to having officers in name, sir; but those as acted as such have been killed."

"You have lost heavily?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is your hull sound?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your chief?"

"He's not aboard, sir."

"Not aboard?"

"No, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"He's gone."

"Was he knocked overboard by a shot?"

"No, sir."

"Where has he gone?"

"Ashore, sir."

"My man, what does this mean?" sternly asked Moncrief.

"Well, sir, the chief was wounded on our third tack back, afore we got your last broadside, and he knew it was no use, that the schooner was yours, and so he called to some of the lads to heave away a boat, and he was lowered into it, along with some of the men."

"How many?"

"About a dozen, sir."

Moncrief was naturally very much annoyed.

He glanced shoreward, and ascertaining how long the chief had been gone, knew that he had had ample time to have landed.

The surf was light, for the sea was smooth, and he could easily run through the breakers in his boat.

Once ashore he could escape in the darkness.

Did the Sea Siren await until daylight, it would be too late to catch the pirates, who would have sought some port, taken possession of a smack, or other vessel, and then escaped.

He felt that he must be content with his capture of the Sea Torch and her crew.

So he hastily ordered the prisoners put in irons, the wounded looked after and the dead thrown into the sea.

"Rossmore, you take command of the prize, with thirty men, and we'll run for New York *via* the Sound.

"I will put my whole crew to work getting things shipshape," Moncrief had said, and two hours after the capture the Sea Torch was ready to sail having been rigged out with the necessary spars.

Going before the wind the two vessels ran to Montauk Point, rounded it, and began then to beat up Long Island Sound to New York.

All on board the Sea Siren were greatly incensed at the trickery of Bianca the Buccaneer, but hoped that he had gotten his death-wound as a balm of their feelings.

As the two pretty vessels reached well into the Sound there was quite a fleet sighted in the darkness, keeping together like a flock of birds flying to roost.

"That is our prize fleet, so we will be able to relieve Captain Farrar, if he wishes to return to Boston with his brig, for we could put a crew on each vessel," said Moncrief.

The fleet was soon overtaken by the schooners, and loud cheers greeted the Sea Siren from the crew of each vessel, the brig-of-war's captain hailing, and saying:

"Moncrief, you are invincible."

The young captain of the brig seemed rather glad to accept Moncrief's offer to relieve him from further duty, for he had a lady-love in Boston; but he put it upon the basis that he wished to be first to carry the news to town that the Sea Siren had captured the Sea Torch and made a fugitive of the tricky buccaneer chief, whose name had been so long a terror from Massachusetts to the West Indies.

So the crew were transferred respectively, and the brig-of-war set sail back to Boston, while the Sea Siren led her prizes in the run for New York.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LONG-BOAT.

WHEN Bianca the Buccaneer saw that the fight was going against him, he quickly put on his thinking cap.

He decided that he had "caught a Tartar," and had made a great mistake in hunting for the Sea Siren, without the aid of his pirate son.

He discovered that the Sea Siren seemed almost as fast as was the vessel built after her model, the Sea Sword.

How to extricate himself he did not exactly know.

His guns he had considered good before, but the Sea Siren's battery was wounding his vessel at a range where his could do no damage.

"If I could only be closer," he muttered, and so he steered so as to be nearer his enemy, when his guns could do no damage.

But the Sea Siren seemed still more dangerous, and the old pirate said:

"If it came to his boarding us, or my boarding him, then the fight would be ours."

But it did not come to that, for the Sea Torch was compelled to run as best she could.

"This can end but one way," said the chief hoarsely.

"But I will not be taken.

"I will beach my schooner first, or set her afire and go ashore in my boats," the old man grimly muttered.

Soon after he was struck down by a wound in the breast.

Instantly he arose, but he felt that he was hard hit.

"I will not die," came fiercely from his lips.

Then he ordered the schooner to be put about and headed for the shore.

He discovered that there were but two boats that were not shattered.

The largest one he ordered fitted with sail and oars, and picked out a crew of twelve men, a coxswain, and the surgeon of the schooner.

"Prepare a bed for me, surgeon, and get your traps on board, and mine.

"Put plenty of stores and water on board also, and have all ready to launch at an instant's notice."

Such were his orders, and the crew thought it was all right, as he would have to go ashore in the boat, when the schooner was beached, while they could spring into the sea and thus escape, setting the Sea Torch on fire first.

But the tricky old chief had formed a plan in his busy brain.

He kept the schooner on her way, the men at quarters, and pouring in a heavy fire, and so they had no time to think.

Then came the disastrous broadside from the brig, that cut away the bowsprit and brought the schooner to.

In the confusion that followed the boat was lowered with the chief and his picked crew on board, and then the surgeon called out:

"Men, the chief says that the Sea Sword is now on her way up the coast, and he goes to meet her.

"Those of you who can had better take to the other boats and pull for the shore; but those who are forced to remain shall be rescued before dawn by the Sea Sword."

The crew cheered; but why, they could not afterward discover.

They made a rush for the boats, to find but one that could be used, and into this crowded so many that it broke from the davits, and dashing against the side of the schooner was stove in, while many were drowned in the struggle for life.

In the mean time, under pressure of her twelve oars, already muffled, the long-boat had gone swiftly shoreward, and the schooner and crew were left to their fate.

Pulling in close to the line of breakers the boat was then, according to the wounded chief's low given order, headed along the coast on a course west by south.

Bianca hoped to meet the Sea Sword coming eastward, as she was due according to agreement, and, if he did not find her, meant to seek her in the retreat near the Highlands of Navesink, which he well knew, having often hidden there in the Sea Torch.

The chief greatly hoped to meet the Sea Sword, that he might gain revenge by at once having her attack the Sea Siren.

Forgetting his own bitter lesson, he said, grimly:

"My son's schooner could capture him."

The boat went along under the powerful stroke of her oarsmen, until the two vessels disappeared in the gloom, and then the sail was set, and the long-boat began to beat close along the shore.

It was toward afternoon when a distant sail was sighted, and all eyes were turned upon it.

After a long look through his glass, the surgeon said:

"It is a schooner, sir."

The old chief gave an exclamation of pleasure, and half an hour after the surgeon said:

"It is the Sea Sword, sir."

"The saints be praised!" fervently ejaculated the buccaneer.

He was suffering greatly, though all had been done for his comfort that was possible.

His bed was amidships, and canvas protected him from the keen wind that was blowing.

The surgeon had been anxious about him, for the wound was a severe one, but he had done all he could to save him.

The men had had a light breakfast, and lunch at noon, with a glass of grog each time, and they were happy, for to escape with their lives was joy enough for them.

The fact that the Sea Sword was near, for all now recognized her, caused the crew to cheer lustily, and signals were set to attract attention, while the long-boat was headed out to meet the schooner.

The lookout had already reported the boat to Captain Bianca, who at first took it for a shore craft, but seeing its course changed, the Sea Sword was headed to meet it.

As the two drew nearer, Basil, who had the deck, called down the cabin companion-way:

"Captain Bianca!"

"Ay, ay."

"Please come on deck."

"Ah, yes, the boat, what is she?" he said, as he approached his lieutenant.

"If I am not mistaken, sir, that is the long-boat of the Sea Torch," and Basil handed his glass to the young pirate captain.

"I think the same, sir," said Hugh Bronx, who stood near, his face wearing the same cloud that had come upon it when he was forced to execute the man who had aided his escape.

"By Heaven! but you are right," cried Rafael Bianca.

Then, after eying the boat for a while, he said:

"It is the long-boat of the Sea Torch, and I recognize Surgeon Valms in the stern.

"Something has befallen the Sea Torch, then?"

"Yes, Basil, and I am afraid it was the meeting with Moncrief.

"Oh, that I had been there with my beautiful vessel.

"But soon we will know all."

"There is a canvas screen amidships, sir, and some one is doubtless sheltered there, and wounded," Hugh Bronx remarked.

"It may be my poor father," was the reply, in a deeply moved voice, and then Bianca gave orders to lay the schooner to, while he hailed the long-boat, which was now but a cable's length away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BIANCA'S LEGACY.

"Ho, the long-boat!" cried Captain Bianca.

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded Surgeon Valmas.

"Who is wounded there with you?"

"The chief."

"I feared it; but what has happened?"

"We met the Sea Siren, sir."

"Curses! I thought so!" hissed Captain Bianca, while a shadow fell upon all on the schooner.

The long-boat was soon alongside the vessel, and the chief was lifted carefully on board.

Then followed some bales and boxes of rich booty, and afterward the men.

"Cast the long-boat loose," ordered Basil, and the schooner was put upon her course as before.

In the mean time the old chief had been borne into the cabin and placed upon a bed hastily arranged for him.

"Father!"

"My son!"

The hands of the two were grasped, and then the young man asked:

"What does Valmas say?"

"He has said nothing."

"You must be examined by my surgeon, Nugent, as well."

The surgeons then came into the cabin and made a careful examination of the wound.

The old chief bore the examination with grim silence, and saw the two surgeons go off to consult.

"How was it, father?"

"I went on a search for Moncrief."

"And found him!"

"Yes, it looks so."

"Well, sir."

"We began a fight at long range, by the light of day.

"His guns outranged mine two to one, and his gunners hit just where they wanted to."

"I am listening, father."

"I was well to windward, but his vessel is a match for yours in speed, for she walked right up to me.

"I kept up a hot fire, and seeing it was no use, ran; but he came on.

"I ran to windward, by short tacks, keeping near the shore, and he outpointed me and gained.

"I gave him a broadside at every turn, but it made no difference, and I saw I was to be taken.

"Then I was wounded, and determined to escape; I manned the long-boat, with what I brought with me.

"He shot my bowsprit away, and then I pushed off, telling the men, if they were taken, I would find you and rescue them."

"Now you know all, except that he got the Sea Torch, and more, the schooner was badly battered and we lost heavily."

"I am glad you escaped at least, father, and your men give me over a hundred in crew, so that I believe we can match Moncrief."

The surgeons then came into the cabin, and the chief asked grimly:

"Is it live or die?"

"Chief, there is no hope, sir," said Nugent.

The old man never changed a muscle, while he replied:

"Well, I cheat the gallows; but how long have I to live?"

"At the furthest, three days; perhaps but one."

"And I may go suddenly?"

"Yes, sir; it depends upon internal hemorrhage."

"I see."

"Ten thousand pesos to each of you if you save my father's life," cried Bianca.

The surgeons shook their heads sadly, but their sorrow was at the hopelessness of their getting the great reward offered.

"Well, gentlemen, please be on hand near, for I wish to have a talk with my son," said the chief.

They bowed and retired.

Bianca then sat down by his father's side and grasped his hand.

"My son?"

"Yes, sir."

"How are you heading?"

"Eastward along Long Island."

"Where bound?"

"In search of Moncrief."

"I see; but whither bound when you met me?"

"In search of you, sir, for I learned in New York that the Sea Siren had run into New York *via* the Sound, and then gone at once in search of you."

"I could trace the rumor to no good source, but the report was afloat, and fearing that Moncrief had gotten wind of your being off the Long Island Coast, I at once ventured out to look you up."

"Ever faithful, my son."

"I would like to try my strength with the Sea Siren."

"I wish you could have your fight ere I die."

"I shall run along the coast, sir, until dark, and then put back, if he is not in sight, for he will doubtless have run into Boston with the Sea Torch, as you say she was crippled."

"Doubtless; but, my son?"

"Yes?"

"I wish to tell you all that I leave you, as my heir."

"Yes, father."

"I leave you my riches, of course, those brought in the long-boat, my Island Bastile, and all there is there, and you will be chief of the band, as you know."

"By my death you will inherit the title and estates of Norman-Hurst Castle, in England, for I leave it to you as a special duty, that you take the life of the man that stands between me and the inheritance now, and will so stand between you and your rights."

"This legacy of hate, of duty, of revenge, of death, you must swear to do for my sake."

The face of the old chief writhed with passion, and he spoke with great strength of voice.

"If so you wish," he continued, "take your cousin for a wife, though of course she must never know you as the slayer of her father, or as a pirate."

"Seek her and win her, when you have cleared this man Moncrief from your path."

"But her father you must kill, yes, kill as you would a snake, and—and—"

The chief gasped for breath; his feelings had wasted his strength, and Captain Bianca called hastily for the surgeons.

They were on hand in an instant; but the eyes had become set, the face rigid, and their skill was of no avail.

Bianca the Buccaneer was dead.

He had died in a paroxysm of hatred, when speaking of the brother who had never wronged him by word or act, his crime in Bianca Norman's sight having been that he was the first born, and hence, by English law, the heir.

CHAPTER XL.

A WARNING.

THE days were passing swiftly, and Christmas was not far away.

Hurst Haven had been put in perfect trim from garret to cellar, and all about it was just what it should be for so joyous an event as the marriage of its young mistress.

The skipper was happy, because he felt that he was going to give his daughter to a noble man, and yet would still have her with him in his home.

Sibyl was happy because she loved Moncrief with all her soul, and the future seemed so bright before her.

The break between Bronx Hall and Hurst Haven had been closed, and the visits of the two young ladies were as frequent as ever, and the love as fond as before.

Allen Rossmore had certainly won the affection of Bessie Bronx, for she thought of him by night and by day, and she told Sibyl over and over again of his noble qualities, until the fair Siren of the Sea smiled and said one day:

"Bessie, you are as deeply in love as I am."

"Oh, no! no!" cried Bessie, though her heart had said:

"Yes, yes!"

Still she must keep her secret until asked by the man she loved, if she loved him.

Every preparation in the way of a grand entertainment had been made at Hurst Haven, and the good things that the larders were filled with could not be counted.

When she heard from her lover that he would arrive on a certain day, invitations to neighbors and friends were to be sent out at once, for they were all ready, with only the date and hour to be filled in when known.

One morning the skipper received a letter by mail that seemed to worry him.

It was in a handwriting unknown to him and it was signed by no name.

Though anonymous it troubled him, and he read it over and over again.

The letter was as follows:

"NEW YORK.

"TO CAPTAIN NORMAN HURST, GREETING:—

"I am unable to come boldly out and tell you face to face what now I write

"But I am so situated that circumstances prevent, in fact render it impossible.

"I write you even without being able to give my name.

"Circumstances, over which I had no control, made me what I am now forced to be, and to remain, until I can accomplish a certain end.

"I saw you, and your daughter in Charleston, and I saw there also Captain Moncrief, Hugh Bronx and others who were nearly allied to you through various causes.

"Seeing your daughter as I did, I wish to serve her, and you.

"I know that there is a plot on hand to land at your home by night and to rob you of your daughter and your riches.

"More, you are to be killed.

"When this will be I cannot say exactly.

"I only wish that I could; but I think it will occur during the month of December.

"When I tell you that brother, Bianca the Buccaneer, is the one who plots against you, then you may feel that my warning should not be disregarded.

"Take my advice and move elsewhere, taking your riches away also, or get a guard from the Continental Army, now on Long Island, for the capture they would make would be worth the while.

"Be warned, I beg of you, for I know well of all I wish.

"Yours in truth, FRIEND."

Such was the letter that the skipper received, and it worried him greatly, as I have said.

"Were it not that we were expecting Moncrief daily now, I would heed this warning," he said, to himself.

"But the Sea Siren will doubtless be in the cove very soon, and then there will be nothing to fear.

"I will, however, keep a couple of men on watch each night, one down at the inlet, to send up a rocket if the vessel runs in, and another at the mansion to watch the approaches.

"I will also arm the farm people and servants, so as to give a warm reception to any one who makes a hostile visit.

"My poor, wicked brother Bianca!

"How sadly he has gone wrong.

"He hates me because I was the eldest, and when I removed myself as I did from all, for the sake of my brothers who coveted what I did not care for, he has found me out to still hate and dog me, yes, and to take my life.

"But I shall die hard," and the skipper looked determined,

"I will not speak to Sibyl about this; and yet, I had better do so, as she will not understand the preparations for war," and he placed the letter before Sibyl, who read it with surprise, tried to think who had been the writer, and then decided, with her father, that the warning should be heeded, as far as lay in their power, in case the attack was made before the coming of the Sea Siren.

CHAPTER XL.

THE LETTER.

IT was the same day as the one on which Captain Hurst had received his warning letter, which he afterward found had not come with his mail, as he had supposed, but been given to the mail-carrier at the gate leading into the estate.

The carrier upon being questioned simply said that a man on horseback had given it to him, asking him to leave it in the hands of Captain Hurst, and that he had given him a guinea for his trouble.

"Tremendous pay for little work, Sands," the skipper said.

"Yes, sir, it was; but as it was a regular letter, sealed and all, I just put it in with your mail and said nothing."

"You should have reported how you got it, Sands, for it was important, and, after reading it I could have mounted my horse and overtaken the man."

"Yes, sir; but his horse showed that he had ridden hard."

"Which way did he go?"

"The New York highway he took, sir."

The skipper turned away, but called back.

"What kind of looking man was he?"

"He looked as though he might be a sailor, sir."

The skipper said no more and went out on the front piazza, to join Sibyl, who was walking briskly up and down enjoying the winter sunset.

"Father, some one is coming up the driveway," she said.

"Yes; a horseman, and one I do not know."

The stranger soon rode up to the hitching-rack, dismounted and approached the mansion, where he was met by the skipper with a hearty:

"Good-evening, neighbor."

"Is this Captain Hurst, sir, of Hurst Haven?"

"Yes, sir; will you walk in?"

"May I ask if that is Miss Hurst, sir?"

"Yes, sir; my daughter."

"I have an important letter for her, sir."

"Here, Sibyl, this gentleman has a letter for you; but come in, sir, for the air is very cold, and I will have your horse taken."

"Thank you, sir," and the stranger entered the cheery sitting-room, and, unbuttoning his great-coat, took from an inner pocket a letter, which he handed to Sibyl, with the remark:

"It is from Captain Moncrief, Miss Hurst."

Sibyl uttered a cry of pleasure, excused herself and went to the window to read the missive, while her father looked to the comfort of the bearer.

He was a man of gentlemanly appearance, and had introduced himself as Mr. Morgan Murtha, a particular friend of Manton Moncrief.

"You must go to your room, Mr. Morgan, and—"

"But I must return to-night, sir."

"No, no, you must not think of it," urged the skipper.

"I will be compelled to leave, sir, within an hour or so, as I hope to catch Captain Moncrief in New York before he sails, and bear Miss Hurst's response to him."

"Well, you know best, but I dislike to see you turn your back upon Hurst Haven in the night; but come to your room, and by the time you are brushed up, supper will be ready."

Having sent a servant to show the visitor to his room, the skipper ordered supper at the earliest moment, and returned to Sibyl.

The lamps were lighted now, and she was seated in an easy-chair, her face flushed, eyes sparkling, and the letter open in her hands.

"Oh, father, see here," and she handed the letter to the skipper who read as follows, aloud:

"On Board Continental Cruiser,

"SEA SIREN,

"NEW YORK HARBOR.

"Tuesday.

"MY OWN PRECIOUS SIBYL:—

"Are you disappointed at getting a specimen of my penmanship, instead of seeing me?

"I hope so.

"But I write to say that I am just back from my eastern cruise, and a most successful one it has been too; but of that I will tell you when we meet.

"Still, let me tell you that I heard of the Sea Torch being off Sandy Hook, and I went in search of Bianca in the greatest haste.

"We met, and I captured the Sea Torch and her crew, but Bianca escaped, badly wounded, in his long-boat, with a dozen men; but he is now harmless, at least for the present, so you need feel no dread of him, say to your good father.

"Complications have, however, arisen, that will send me at once out of port again, on a run to Charleston, and as this would postpone our marriage for several months and it is within a few days of the appointed time, I am going to beg of you to become my wife ere I sail, and to accompany me.

"You will meet your old friends in Charleston, and my mission is not a fighting one, but of special service.

"I may be ordered off at an instant's notice, and so will ask you, if you grant my request, to hold yourself in readiness to become my wife and depart with me.

"Duty demands my presence here, or I would come in person.

"As I cannot, I send this by my friend, Mr. Morgan Murtha, who will bring your reply.

"As soon as I get orders to depart I shall head for Hurst Haven, and I think you can expect me by sunset to-morrow evening; but let the marriage be private under the circumstances, if it so meets yours and your father's wishes.

"Hoping for a response that will fill my heart with joy, and hoping that you will wear the accompanying gem as a souvenir, I remain always,

"Devotedly,

"MANTON MONCRIEF."

CHAPTER XLII.

WEDDED.

THE skipper read the letter aloud, commenting upon it with Sibyl as he went along, and when he had concluded, his daughter handed him a superb diamond solitaire ring, the *souvenir* sent by her lover.

"This is a beautiful gift, my child."

"It is, indeed, father, and must have cost dear, good Manton a year's pay."

"All of that, for I never saw a finer stone, and the setting is of eagles' claws."

"But, what of the letter, father?" and Sibyl placed the ring upon her finger, at the same time glancing admiringly at it.

"What do you say, my child?"

"I am willing to anticipate our marriage a week, as Manton asks, if you can give me up for the run to Charleston?"

"Oh, yes! I will have to do so, and we will decide it as he wishes."

"I will have hampers made of what was intended for feasting, and send them on board the schooner, and to-morrow morning I will ride over to Parson Crane's and ask him to hold himself in readiness to be called on at a moment's notice."

"You are so good, father."

"Then you had better pack up your things and have Silvie, your maid, prepare to go with you."

"Thank you, father; but I would so like to ask Bessie Bronx to go with me, for Lieutenant Rossmore is on board, you know, and being a married lady, I could chaperon her," and Sibyl laughed at the thought.

"It might be convenient for Moncrief, you know, to have her, and besides, she could not leave her mother in her grief for the loss of Hugh."

"True, father; but we can, at least, ask them to the marriage."

"Yes, we can send over and request them to come, when the vessel arrives, for she will remain several hours at least; but here comes Mr. Murtha," and while we are smoking after supper, you had better write your reply to Moncrief."

The visitor entered, and seemed quite warmed up after his long, cold ride.

Supper was soon announced, and Mr. Murtha told how impossible it was for Captain Moncrief to come to Hurst Haven, so had asked him to represent him.

Soon after supper his horse was led around, and wrapped in his great-coat, and bearing Sibyl's letter, he rode away at a brisk canter on his return to the distant city, taking the highway that would lead him to the Brooklyn ferry, which he hoped to reach in time for the first boat across to the city.

Until late that night Sibyl, and her mulatto maid, Silvie, packed up her trunks, for the fair maiden had a superb *trousseau* even

for those times, and by noon the next day all was in readiness for the coming of the Sea Siren.

The skipper had loaded on a wagon a number of hampers, boxes and barrels, containing a "feast" for all on board ship, from cabin to steerage, and these were to be sent down to the cove and put on board as soon as the vessel ran into the inlet.

Sibyl had written a note over to Bessie, telling her the situation, and asking that she and her mother might be ready to come over when notified, and they had promised to do so.

The parson had also been notified, and said that he would be ready and all that was waited for then was the bridegroom.

The sun sunk in a cloudy sky, and Sibyl, watching it, detected a sail far down the coast, but could not see, before night came on if it was the Sea Siren or not.

The lights flashed in the house, the beacon in the cupola was lighted, and Sibyl and her father were seated in the sitting-room awaiting supper.

Soon a knock came upon the outer door, and an instant after a tall, cloaked form stepped into the room.

"Manton!"

"Sibyl!"

She sprung forward and he drew her toward him, and then the skipper grasped his hand in welcome.

"I have but a short hour, if as much, for I am under imperative orders to reach Charleston with all haste."

"Your dear letter I received, Sibyl, and I am the happiest man on earth, for I carry you away my bride to-night."

He spoke hastily, and Captain Hurst hastily left the room and dispatched the carriage for the parson, who lived several miles away, and sent another man on horseback to Bronx Hall to bid Mrs. Bronx and Bessie come at once.

Then he had horses hitched to the loaded wagon and sent it down to the cove, with orders to put the things on the schooner with all haste, and the wagon was to then return for the baggage.

The butler was ordered to delay supper, and add to its luxuries, while he was also told to place the best wine in the house on the sideboard ready for use.

Having attended to his duties the skipper returned to the sitting-room, but found the young sailor alone, for at his request, Sibyl had gone up to dress, so that there would not be a moment of delay after the ceremony.

"You see, sir, I stole the time to run in here and get my bride," laughed the handsome captain, "and daylight must find my vessel far away from Sandy Hook on her southerly cruise."

"But will not Rossmore be up, Moncrief, or some of your officers?"

"No, Captain Hurst, for there was duty to do aboard ship."

"I am sorry that I am so hurried, but it cannot be helped."

While the two were talking Mrs. Bronx and Bessie arrived, and the latter ran right up to Sibyl's room, after an introduction.

"What do you think of him, Bess?" asked Sibyl.

"Just splendid! he's about as handsome as Lieutenant Rossmore."

Sibyl laughed, and soon after the two descended to the parlors, which were now brilliantly lighted.

Sibyl was all dressed for going out, and Parson Crane having just arrived it was decided to have no delay, as Captain Moncrief was anxious to get away at once.

And so the knot of wedlock was securely tied, congratulations were given the happy couple, and after a hearty supper, all entered the carriages and drove down to the shore.

There the boat from the schooner awaited them, and farewells were said with tearful eyes, as the gallant captain aided his wife to a cushioned seat.

Silvie followed, and then springing aboard the young sailor said sternly:

"Give way!"

As the boat reached the schooner's side, her anchor was hauled up, and sail being already set, she glided away under a six-knot breeze, and disappearing in the gloom went swiftly through the inlet out to sea, leaving

Bessie quite broken-hearted for the loss of her friend, and because she had not seen Allen Rossmore as well.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE RETURN.

WHEN the little party on the shore saw the schooner glide away in the darkness, they re-entered the carriage and were driven back to Hurst Haven, for the skipper insisted that no one had eaten any supper, only sipped a glass of wine, and they must not leave him immediately in his loneliness.

So back to Hurst Haven they went, and the wealth and happiness of the young couple were drank over, and seated before a blazing fire, the mother and daughter, the skipper and the parson, chatted together, for quite a while, for it was yet some time before midnight.

Suddenly all were startled by a loud rap on the door of the rear hall, and going to it himself, Captain Hurst could hardly believe his eyes as he saw before him Manton Moncrief.

He uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, and cried:

"What, back again?"

"Yes, sir, and I saw the mansion so highly illuminated, that I made up my mind I would come up after dropping anchor."

"Then you have come back into the cove?"

"Not ten minutes ago."

"But why did you not bring Sibyl with you?"

"Sibyl?"

"Is she not here?"

"Sibyl here? Why, Moncrief, where is she?"

"I left her here two months ago, and have not seen her since."

"Great God! do not tell me aught has befallen her, Captain Hurst!"

This conversation had occurred in the hallway, but it had been heard by those in the sitting-room.

At the last words of Captain Moncrief, the skipper seized him by the arm and fairly dragged him into the sitting-room.

With a face that was white, he gazed upon Moncrief and asked hoarsely:

"Do you mean that you did not leave this house hardly over an hour ago, with Sibyl as your wife?"

"Good God, Captain Hurst! I have not been in this house for very nearly two months."

"Moncrief, are you mad?"

"Mad! it seems that you are."

"Speak, sir; speak, madam, and explain this damning mystery!" and Moncrief turned to Mrs. Bronx and Parson Crane.

Instantly Bessie glided forward and said:

"Captain Hurst, is this Captain Moncrief?"

"It surely is."

"What, do you doubt my identity?"

"No, you are Moncrief."

"Then there has been a bitter mockery practiced this night, Captain Hurst, for, though startlingly alike in face, form, voice, manner, this is not the one whose wife Sibyl became to-night," said Bessie.

Moncrief fairly reeled and became livid, while Captain Hurst sunk into a chair unable to move.

"Sibyl was married to-night?" gasped Moncrief.

All were silent, and he said quickly, addressing Bessie.

"You, lady, seem to be yourself, so tell me, pray, what has happened."

"Bessie, yonder in my desk is a letter—give it to me," said the skipper, almost in a whisper.

She sprung to the desk and obeyed.

"Did you not write this letter?"

Moncrief grasped at it, glanced at it, and said in a mystified way:

"It is my writing, is it not?"

"But, no, I have not been in New York since I left on my eastward cruise until last night, leaving there to-day to come here."

"Read it, for it will explain," said Bessie.

He cast his eyes rapidly over the letter, his face growing savage in its fierceness as he did so, and presently the words broke in angry tones from his lips:

"And this man came here to-night, this forger of my name, and stole my bride?"

"He did."

"Great God! can it be that all of you were deceived?"

"Was he so much my likeness as to deceive you, ay, and Sibyl, too, Captain Hurst?"

"He was your very counterpart, Moncrief, and more, his voice, his actions were yours, while the vessel, which we saw by the lights burned on board, when the boat reached the gangway, was exactly like the Sea Siren."

"Oh, Heaven have mercy! But, who is it that has stolen my child? God have mercy upon her!" groaned Captain Hurst.

An instant stood Moncrief, like a statue, and then he said:

"This letter says that he goes to Charleston; so I will pursue on that course."

"An hour's start, say you, ay, two hours ere I can get under way."

"So be it. I go, and God help the man who has done this foul deed."

"Hold, Moncrief, for I will go with you," shouted Captain Hurst.

But Moncrief had already darted to the door, and when the skipper got on his hat and cloak to follow, he found that he had sprung into the carriage waiting to drive the parson home, and was then driving furiously away toward the cove.

Mrs. Bronx's carriage was also in waiting, and into it went the skipper, the parson and the ladies, and it followed rapidly.

But, when it drew up on the shore they saw the Sea Siren already moving out of the cove, and the coachman of the other vehicle said that the young captain had sailed as soon as he sprung from the carriage, and ordered the anchor slipped and sail set, while he got into a shore-boat and rowed himself out to the vessel.

Watching the Sea Siren they saw her completely covered with canvas ere she reached the channel out to sea, and returning quickly to the mansion they beheld her, with the aid of strong night-glasses, fairly flying southward over the starlit waters.

"He will catch that robber of my child, for Moncrief never fails," said the skipper, in a voice that showed perfect trust in the young sailor.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BIANCA'S PLOT.

AFTER the burial of his father, Captain Bianca sailed for the retreat on the Shrewsbury, and again went by boat to Staten Island, putting up at the Tarrylate Inn, greatly to the delight of mine host, Van Gilt.

At the urgent request of Basil, who asked to visit the city on some private matters, Bianca allowed that officer to accompany him, and the schooner was left in the charge of a sub-officer, while Hugh Bronx was ironed, confined to his cabin, and a guard placed over him.

Arriving in the city the two pirate officers parted, promising to meet again at a certain tavern within a few hours.

Bianca went at once to an address he knew well, for it was the house of a man who had long received and sold the piratical booty of the old chief.

"Murtha," he said, to the man in charge:

"I have a special duty for you to perform, and I will pay you well for it."

"Some time ago I got, by bribery, some writing of a certain officer, and I have copied his style perfectly, for I have a knack that way, and have written a letter pretending to come from him."

Bianca then went on to tell the man Murtha just what he wished him to do, and gave him a handsome diamond solitaire ring, to hand to Sibyl Hurst.

The reader has seen how well the bearer of that forged letter did his work, and to what it led.

Upon his return he was to leave the response with Landlord Van Gilt at the Tarrylate Tavern, Staten Island, and a man from the schooner awaited there for it, and placed it in the hands of Bianca, to whom the outer envelope had been addressed by Murtha.

Basil had in the meantime gone on a similar mission to one whom he knew.

"He shall not kill that good old man, rob his home, and carry off his beautiful daughter, if I can help it," had said Basil.

So he wrote the anonymous letter, which the reader saw Captain Hurst receive, and dispatched it by a faithful messenger, who

also did his work equally well with the bearer of the letter to Sibyl.

The lieutenant having done his duty, met his captain at the inn, and the two returned to the Sea Sword.

Walking the cabin of the Sea Sword, as she lay in her retreat, the face of Bianca was a study.

He clasped in his hand the letter of Sibyl, written in her loving way to Moncrief.

"I saw her when, as a pretended surveyor of the coast, I was her father's guest."

"My beard and spectacles then prevented her seeing the likeness to her lover, but I gazed upon her enraptured, and I loved her."

"I could not help it, and the demon in me made me swear to win her."

"Had I met her, and tried to win her as I am, then she would have scorned me."

"But if I can win her under false pretenses I will make her happy for life. I will take my riches, give up this evil life, and in England elevate myself to her."

"It is hard on Moncrief, but he is the slayer of my father, and I am revengeful."

"Her father I cannot kill, so will let him believe his child lost for the present, until he knows the truth of who I am, though I will not confess to having been a pirate, and then I can gain Norman Hurst's inheritance and title when he dies."

"I know little of women, having been raised on a pirate deck, but I believe I can win my sweet cousin's love and make her happy, once she is bound to me by marriage."

"Besides, I am so much like Moncrief she should not object."

"I know that the likeness is most striking, for that scamp Bronx nearly fainted when he saw me on the island, believing he was delivered over to Moncrief."

"Then, too, I was spoken to a dozen times when in New York for Moncrief, and the old admiral would never have made that mistake and talked with me half an hour that day on the street had not the resemblance in form, voice and face been remarkable."

"No, I feel I can risk it, and I will!"

"I will sail from here soon, so as to reach the inlet just after dark, as I can do with the present steady wind, and Hugh Bronx shall pilot me in."

"Then, on our return to the island, I will give him a vessel and some money, and let him turn pirate on his own hook, and his neck will be stretched very soon, I am sure."

"Ho, Basil!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the answer from on deck.

"Get the Sea Sword under way and run out to sea."

"Ay, ay, Captain Bianca!"

And soon after the pretty craft was gliding along under the shadow of the Highlands.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE RUN IN.

IT was shortly after dark when the Sea Sword drew near the inlet which led into the cove, or bay, near Hurst Haven and Bronx Hall.

Captain Bianca had sent for Hugh Bronx to come into his cabin, and had said:

"Bronx, I have appeared to treat you with severity, and you have only yourself to blame."

"Had you acted toward me in all fairness, as you pledged yourself, you would have been treated with respect, kindness, and allowed liberty."

"But you proved false to your pledges, and, though you have acted as an officer, in my absence from the vessel I had to iron you."

"Now, Bronx, the time has come when I need your services."

"Yes, sir."

"I desire to run in to-night to the anchorage near Hurst Haven."

"You intend to do this?"

"I do."

"May I ask your purpose?"

"Yes; for it is to avenge my father's death, in a measure."

"You intend to drag Sibyl Hurst from her home, and—"

"Oh, no! I do not intend to offer one unkind act or word to that young lady."

"Ah!"

"So you are to run the schooner in, and out, and if you do well by me, upon my return to the Island Bastille, whither I now am

going, I shall give you a vessel, armed and equipped, and you can cruise on your own responsibility as you please."

"You will do this for me?" asked Bronx, eagerly.

"I will."

"I will do it."

"But there is one thing more, Mr. Bronx."

"Yes, sir."

"It is in case you prove false."

"I will not."

"I am not so sure of that."

"I will pledge my honor, sir."

"I will not accept your honor as a pledge."

"What can I do?"

"I shall be the one to act."

"You?"

"Yes."

"How, please?"

"I shall place you at the wheel?"

"Yes, sir."

"You alone are to be there."

"Yes."

"The wind is fair, and not too strong."

"Well?"

"I shall stand near you."

"I am willing."

"The flag halyard shall be replaced by a

very stout rope, one end of it being held by six good men who stand to windward, for the wind will be abeam as we go in."

"Yes, sir."

"The other end shall have a noose in it."

"A noose?"

"Yes."

"What for, sir?"

"To put about your neck."

Hugh Bronx turned livid.

"It shall be about your neck, drawn fairly taut, and when I see the slightest show on your part, Bronx, to wreck my vessel, or to make a mistake, I shall simply give the order:

"Haul hard!"

"I will not betray you."

"Not if I can help it; but I shall take this measure as a precaution that you do not."

"Now go on deck, sir, and get ready to run in."

"Yes, sir."

"And be sure you are not hoisted to the peak, where the flag should go."

"I will not be."

"It is well; now ask Lieutenant Basil to come in here."

"Yes, sir."

Hugh Bronx left the cabin trembling violently, and a moment after Basil entered.

"Basil?"

"Well, captain?"

"I feel that I can trust you where I could not another, and so I ask you to do me a favor."

"Certainly, sir."

"I intend to run into the inlet, and anchor near Hurst Haven mansion; but as Moncrief's Sea Siren, I have reason to believe, is due here about this time, I desire you to take a boat with four men, and row off the inlet half a mile."

"Keep your watch up and down the coast as far as you can see, with your most powerful glass, and should you discover a schooner, which you suspect might be the Sea Siren instantly send up a rocket as a warning to me."

"If it is not answered from the Sea Sword in a minute's time, send another, and so on, until it is answered."

"As I run out I will pick you up, and if it should prove the Sea Siren, then we will fight her."

"I will do as you command, Captain Bianca, but may I ask if you intend to harm the inmates of Hurst Haven?"

"I forgive this in you, Basil, but do not presume too far."

"Still, I will answer your question, and say that I do not intend to harm the inmates of Hurst Haven, nor to rob them."

"I shall go alone to the mansion, as I have an important object in doing so."

"Now, please, go on deck, and get ready to be dropped astern with your boat."

Basil bowed and retired, and soon after Bianca ascended to the deck.

He found that the schooner was a mile offshore, and approaching the inlet, Hugh Bronx standing by the helmsman, while Basil's boat and men turned astern.

"Now, Basil, we'll set you adrift," he said, and Basil, going over into the boat, was

the next instant dancing in the schooner's wake.

"Now, Mr. Bronx, we are ready for you to take the wheel."

Hugh Bronx stepped to his post, while a seaman, at a command from Bianca, placed a noose, already rigged, about his neck.

Six men then grasped the other end of the rope, and the trembling pilot felt that he dared make no mistake.

"Now, Pilot Bronx, you know your doom if the Sea Sword does not go through that channel in safety!" said Bianca the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TWO SHOTS.

THE reader is now well aware how completely Sibyl had been tricked, and by Bianca the Buccaneer, whose striking resemblance to her lover had deceived all who had met him.

There was something about Bianca, when he had come to the mansion to claim her as his wife, that did not seem like her lover; but, suspecting no wrong, she had not dreamed how she was being deceived.

It seemed strange that not a high officer of his vessel came up with him to Hurst Haven, but then his great haste had been his excuse for this.

Once on board the vessel, Sibyl had expected to be met by Allen Rossmore and other officers whom she knew, or greeted with a cheer by the men; but instead, her husband had hastened with her directly to the cabin, and told her to make herself at home there, and Silvie to take off her mistress's wraps, while he saw to getting out to sea.

"Don't you wish a pilot out, Manton?" Sibyl asked with a smile, meaning to herself be the pilot.

"No, dear, not to-night, for I wish you to remain in the cabin."

"When we are at sea I will come back to you."

So saying Bianca went on deck.

Glancing about the cabin Sibyl said:

"Why the cabin has been wholly changed, Silvie, and is it not superbly fitted up?"

"I wonder when this was done."

"And look at the numerous weapons, and so many beautiful things I never saw before."

"I declare, this is quite a surprise to me."

Her state-room was fitted up in the same luxurious manner, and all about the cabin was a delightful surprise to Sibyl, so much grander was it than had been the comfortable but plain furnishings of the Sea Siren.

When Bianca went on deck he at once sent to have Hugh Bronx brought to the wheel, for that person had been placed under guard in the steerage, as soon as the schooner dropped anchor in the cove.

"We will run out now, Bronx," said the pirate captain.

The men at once stepped forward, the noose was placed over the pilot's neck, and, under the same circumstances as those in which he had run in, he took the wheel and headed out to sea.

"No rocket has been sent up by Basil outside, so we are all safe," Bianca had said as the schooner entered the inlet channel.

With a bold hand, for he knew the channel well, Hugh Bronx ran the Sea Sword out to sea.

Soon the boat was sighted, the schooner luffed sharp, and Basil and his men were on board.

The boat was hauled up to the davits and as the schooner got headway once more Bianca said:

"No sail was sighted, Basil?"

"Yes, sir, just as I saw you coming out, I saw a sail far off toward Sandy Hook, but I did not send up a rocket as I thought there was no need of it."

"You were right."

"We will now head out to sea half a dozen leagues and then lay our course south."

"Yes, sir."

In the mean time, having done his duty, Hugh Bronx had been relieved from his perilous situation, and was standing near the skylight, glancing down into the cabin.

He started, bent forward, his eyes seemed to protrude from their sockets, and turning, with a wild cry, he sprang toward Bianca,

while, his arms having been returned to him, he drew a pistol and leveled it at Bianca.

Bianca, in going to the mansion, had laid aside his side arms, and, not resuming them, he was at the mercy of the infuriated man, who cried:

"Villain! devil! you have deceived me, for you have Sibyl Hurst a captive in your cabin, and you shall die!"

He pulled the trigger as he spoke, but a second quicker than his movement was that of Basil, who, seeing the danger of his chief, fired at Hugh Bronx.

The two pistols were discharged almost together; but the bullet of Basil's weapon had entered the body of Hugh Bronx the instant his finger drew trigger, and his aim was thus destroyed.

With an oath Hugh Bronx fell to the deck, while Bianca said:

"Basil, I owe you my life. It is a debt I will not forget to pay. Is he dead?"

"I think not, sir," and Basil bent over the prostrate form, just as the companionway was thrown open and Sibyl sprang upon deck, alarmed by the firing.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SCORNED.

BIANCA started as he caught sight of Sibyl, and springing toward her, would have led her back to the cabin; but the battle lanterns about the deck revealed to her the prostrate form.

"Oh! what has happened, Manton?" she cried.

Then from the form lying prone upon the deck, came the words:

"Manton! You call that man Manton?"

"You were deceived, then, as I was, by him, Sibyl Hurst, for he is not Manton Moncrief, as you believe, but Bianca the Buccaneer!"

"Ha! ha! I am dying, but I am avenged on you, Sibyl, for you are in the power of a pirate!"

The words were spoken in a low tone, and with an effort; but they were spoken with a clear, distinct voice, and all heard it.

A wild look, like that of a deer at bay, Sibyl turned upon Bianca, and then she sprang to the side of the dying man.

"Oh, Heaven! you are Hugh Bronx!"

"Yes," was the low reply.

"Do you speak the truth?"

He tried to respond, his face writhed, he gasped for breath and fell back dead.

"Come, Sibyl, come, and let me tell you what his strange words mean."

It was Bianca who spoke, and he led her unresistingly into the cabin.

By the bright cabin lamp she turned her eyes full upon him; her face was death-like in its pallor, her lips were set and her eyes burned.

"What does it mean?—for now that I look at you with the eyes of suspicion, you do not seem to be Manton Moncrief; though, God knows, if you are not, you are his living image!"

"Sit down there, Sibyl, and hear my story."

"I will hear nothing until I have heard if you are, or are not, Manton Moncrief."

"Sibyl, I will tell you, as I unfold my story, all that you would know; but you must listen to me and hear all, or nothing."

She sunk back in her chair, covered her face with her hands, and said:

"Go on; I listen."

He saw that she was deeply moved, that her form trembled, and her face was white; but he said, in his soft, pleasant voice:

"Sibyl, you and I are cousins, for I am the son of your father's brother."

She shrunk from him, but uttered no word.

"My father hated your father as sincerely as I love you."

"My father was Bianca the Buccaneer, and he meant to kill your father and force you into a marriage with me when he held you captive."

"In action, a short while since, with the Sea Siren, my father lost his vessel, escaped to mine, and died—so you have nothing to fear from him."

"Thank God! but are not you as bad?" came from the lips of the poor girl.

"With no desire to carry out my father's revenge, I determined to seek your home and to meet you and your father."

"I did so, disguised in a false beard, wig, and wearing spectacles, you remember, for I was the pretended coast-surveyor."

Sibyl shuddered violently.

"Seeing you I loved you, and determined to make you my wife."

"I could do so in but one way, and I plotted that way."

"I meant to tell you that I would give up the past life, take my riches, and, going to England with you and your father, get back the title and estates of Norman-Hurst Castle, and devote my life to your happiness."

"Taking advantage of my strange likeness to Moncrief, for I have seen it tested often, I did what I did, and made you my wife."

"Now I throw myself upon your mercy, ask your forgiveness, and beg you to love me and let me make you happy."

In an instant Sibyl had sprung from her chair, and with face flushed with anger, and eyes blazing, she cried in tones that rung with scorn.

"Villain, coward, pirate! I hate, I abhor you, and sooner would I die a thousand deaths than have you touch me, or come near me."

"Go, or I will take my own life to be rid of your hated presence!"

Bianca turned very pale. He had never been thwarted in his life, never had such words thrown in his teeth. It aroused the demon in him, for he responded in a voice of thunder:

"By Heaven, girl! you defy me, do you? Fool! my very slave you shall be!"

He started toward her, his hand outstretched, and she sprang back with a cry of terror.

At that moment a form appeared in the companionway, and a voice exclaimed:

"Hold, Captain Bianca! that lady is under my protection!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FRIEND.

WITH livid face Bianca turned upon the bold intruder, while Sibyl, feeling that she had a friend near, uttered a cry of joy.

To the amazement of Bianca he saw Basil before him!

Instantly he turned upon his lieutenant and hissed forth:

"This lady is my wife, sir. How dare you utter such words to me?"

"Captain Bianca, I beg you to be calm and listen to me."

"What have you to say, sir?"

"Much of deep interest to you, sir."

"The vessel is not moving—what does it mean?"

"A lull in the wind, sir; but I think it is but temporary, as there are wind clouds to the westward."

"Then tell me what your interference here means, for Basil, I do not wish to act harshly toward you."

Sibyl gazed at the young lieutenant, and, to her utter amazement recognized the man, Basil Brandon, who had saved her from being lost in the storm at Charleston.

But she uttered no word, but gazed upon his daring, determined face, wondering if it was in his power to save her.

"Captain Bianca," and Basil spoke in a distinct, firm voice; "I had the honor of saving that lady's life once, for I confess it now, as I see that she recognizes me."

"I was your spy then, sent to Charleston to do your bidding, and I did it well, as you admitted. But seeing her, I swore then that she should never be harmed by your father or yourself."

"And, sir, do you dare face me with those words?" cried Bianca.

"Yes, Captain Bianca—Hold! hear what I have to say and then act."

"The crew of this vessel, Captain Bianca, are true as steel to you in all but one thing; but they are truer to me in that one thing."

"If I give the word to the contrary, sir, not a man on board this vessel will move at your command."

"By Neptune's beard! but I'll test them!"

"Don't do it, for it will only humiliate you, and you will lose your power in the future over them. Remember that I picked the men for your vessel, that they have served with me under your father, and under you. They are all pledged to follow my lead if I call on them, even against you, though I never led them to suspect I plotted

against you; so I beg of you to listen to reason, and grant my demand."

"Not until I have tested the truth of your words with the men."

"Then call any one, any two, you deem most loyal to you, into this cabin, and give them an order. I will countermand the order, and we will see which they obey. So, select your men, captain!"

"Order Cuba and Turk here."

Basil stepped up the companionway and called to an under-officer to send the two men named to the cabin.

They soon came and Bianca said:

"Turk, I wish you and Cuba to bind that young lady hand and foot."

The two men started to obey, while Sibyl uttered a cry and shrunk back in alarm.

"Hold, men! I say *no*! That young lady shall not be bound," and Basil spoke in his quiet, natural voice.

The two seamen stopped short, and gazed from one to the other of the two officers.

"Obey me, you devils!" shouted Bianca.

The men stood still and glanced at Basil.

"Do you not hear?" roared Bianca.

"Men, go on deck and do not, under any circumstances, speak of what has just occurred here."

The two bowed at the words of Basil, and left the cabin, while Bianca stood like one dumfounded. He seemed stunned, and for a moment uttered no word, while a look of joy came over Sibyl's face.

"Basil, you spoke the truth. I have no authority on my own vessel," the chief mournfully admitted.

"You are wrong there, captain, for if you went on deck you would find you held full sway; only where that lady is concerned the men obeyed me; so you see you are in my power."

"And were I to kill you?" hissed Bianca.

"You would lose your vessel and your life."

Bianca, confronted with such stern facts, well realized that he must compromise, so he said:

"Well, what do you wish?"

"That you return that lady to her home."

"Which I will not do."

"Don't defy me, Captain Bianca."

"You know that my pilot is dead?"

"I can pilot the schooner into the inlet, sir," declared Sibyl promptly.

"You?"

"Yes, sir, for I have taken the Sea Siren in, and other vessels."

"Then, truly you are the woman to be a sailor's bride," rejoined Bianca.

Sibyl made no reply, and Basil said:

"Captain Bianca, run in nearer the shore, and place the lady and her maid, when daylight comes, upon some coasting vessel bound to Philadelphia, and from there she can go home by stage."

"On one condition."

"Name it."

"That you accompany her."

"I will do so."

"I desire to get rid of you, Basil."

"Yes, sir."

"And you can take those two men, Turk and Cuba with you."

"As you please, sir."

"I will give you one of the schooner's boats to go ashore in, you and your party, and you can make your way up to Philadelphia."

"Yes, with Miss Hurst and her maid?"

"With Mrs. Rafael Hurst, for that is her name."

"So be it, sir, I will go—"

"Lieutenant Basil, there is a sail coming astern, sir, and she has a piping breeze," called an officer, opening the companionway.

Instantly Bianca and Basil bounded to the deck.

The Sea Sword had been becalmed, but a high breeze was now coming, and she began to feel its effects.

Glancing astern the two officers beheld about a mile away, a vessel coming along at a swift pace and literally buried under the canvas she carried.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE TWIN SCHOONERS.

WHEN Bianca saw this vessel in his wake, he was sure that she was a cruiser, and her

vast spread of canvas caused her to look like a craft double the tonnage of the Sea Sword.

No merchant craft would assuredly run after a strange vessel as that one was doing.

"I do not wish a combat, Basil, with the lady on board, so crowd on sail, and we'll drop that fellow out of sight; then I will keep my promise to you," were Bianca's orders.

Basil gave the command to crowd on all sail that the Sea Sword would carry, and she began to fly through the water. The breeze was blowing fresh, a ten-knot breeze, and the Sea Sword was in splendid trim, so she fairly danced along, to the admiration of her crew.

But, to the amazement of all, the stranger was not dropped astern.

"I do not believe we are gaining, Basil," remarked the pirate.

"No, sir, we are not."

After a short while the chief said, sharply:

"She is gaining!"

"You are right, Captain Bianca; she is overhauling us."

"We have no more canvas to set?"

"No, sir; every stitch is up that will draw."

"We will change our course so as to bring the wind abeam, and I know the Sea Sword will run away from him, then."

The change was made, and the Sea Sword went dashing away on her best point of sailing; but the stranger also changed, so as to bring the wind over his quarter, and this caused him to be running toward the Sea Sword in an oblique direction.

Still, the pirate craft did not gain; on the contrary, the stranger drew nearer.

"Basil, but one craft can sail with the Sea Sword as yonder one does."

"True, sir; and therefore that schooner can only be the—"

"The Sea Siren!"

Bianca started at the voice, and saw Sibyl standing on deck.

"You had better retire to the cabin, for yonder craft will open fire soon," he said, coldly.

"I have faced a hot fire before, and do not fear it," was the reply.

"We must fight, Basil, so go below, madam, or I shall have to use force."

"I obey to save myself the indignity," was Sibyl's reply, and she went back to the cabin.

"Basil, call the men to quarters, for I shall open the fight."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the orders were given.

The men went to their guns ready for work, and then came the command to strip the schooner for action.

The extra canvas was taken in, and the Sea Sword was ready for the fray.

These maneuvers upon the pursued were without doubt seen by those on board the pursuer, but she did not fire, nor change her course, nor take in a stitch of canvas.

"It is strange Moncrief does not fire," observed Bianca, adding:

"If that is the Sea Siren, he doubtless has a reason for it."

"What reason, Basil?"

"Miss Hurst is on board."

"Ah! you think he knows?"

"His vessel must have been the one I sighted near Sandy Hook, and as we stood out to sea and were caught in that calm, and had such a light wind, he has had time to run into the basin, find out what you did, and so has pursued."

"You are right; and if he knows he will fight like a very demon."

"He always does."

"So do I; but see! we hold her now pretty well; she is near enough, so luff and give her a broadside."

The order was promptly obeyed, and the guns of the Sea Sword, as they flashed forth from bow to stern, caused the stanch vessel to tremble.

"Ha! that did no damage— Ah! down come her upper sails!"

"No, sir; she is taking in her canvas to fight; I do not think we hurt her much."

"Men, do better next time, for that is the Sea Siren you are fighting," called out Bianca.

Again a broadside was delivered and the crash of iron against wood was heard, as the shot tore their way through the pursuer.

Still the Sea Siren returned no fire, but came on with all speed, as though anxious for close quarters.

The Sea Sword now opened rapidly, and the two vessels began to draw very close together, the pirate maneuvering for position.

The hot fire of the Sea Sword was however not returned, though it was evident the cruiser was suffering under it.

Nearer and nearer drew the Sea Siren, until but a short distance separated the two beautiful craft, and then was heard an order that rung like a bugle:

"Ready at your guns there! Fire!"

The guns of the Sea Siren flashed as though fired by one man.

Then it was evident why Moncrief had reserved his fire, for not willing to fire an iron ball, that might cut through the hull of the pirate, he had waited to come to close quarters and then, loaded with grape, the guns were discharged.

The effect was fearful, for the iron rain fairly deluged the pirate, from stem to stern, mowing down men and causing a momentary panic, while the short ropes of the fore and mainsail were cut and the sails came to the deck with a crash, leaving the outlaw craft under jib alone.

In the smoke and confusion the Sea Siren loomed up alongside, and then followed a shock, as the two schooners came together.

"Throw grapnels! Boarders follow me!"

The same trumpet voice was heard, and Moncrief and half a hundred men leaped upon the deck of the Sea Sword, and their irrepressible rush drove the pirates amidships, where a desperate stand was made.

But the high bows of the Sea Siren looked down over the low stern of the pirate schooner, and, finding that he could use the bow pivot to great advantage, Allen Rossmore shouted:

"Down on the deck, Sea Sirens!"

Down dropped Moncrief and his men, and many a pirate, too, who heard the warning cry; but Allen Rossmore had calculated well, and firing the pivot gun, a shower of grape struck the front of the buccaneer line and went hurtling forward, laying a score on the deck.

"Well done, Rossmore!"

"Up and at them, lads!" shouted Moncrief, and ere the pirates could recover from the shock, the cutlasses of the crew of the Sea Siren were cutting them down without mercy.

Then cries for quarter arose upon all sides, and the Sea Siren had won her greatest victory.

CHAPTER L.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the victory was won, the deck of the pirate craft presented a sickening scene, for it was strewn with dead and dying, and the boards were slippery with human blood.

The schooner had suffered but little from the fire of grape-shot, other than splintered bulwarks and deck, and severed rigging, while the fire of the pirate had been severe against the Sea Siren as well as her crew, though the pirates had lost fearfully.

Among the dead, sword in hand, lay Bianca the Buccaneer, killed by a grape-shot when Allen Rossmore fired his terrible charge.

The light of the battle lanterns showed him distinctly to the gaze of Moncrief, who stood regarding him.

Upon his bared right arm, in India ink, was a crest and a name.

The crest was that of the Norman Hurst family, and the name was:

"RAFAEL HURST."

This told the story, were other evidence besides the startling resemblance wanting to show that he was kindred to Manton Moncrief, for upon his arm, in India ink, was the same crest and two initials:

"B H."

At this Moncrief wondered in silence, and turned away to speak to Allen Rossmore, who called him.

"Well, Rossmore?"

"Miss Hurst is on board, sir, safe in the cabin. She awaits you."

Moncrief walked rapidly aft, and entered the cabin.

Sibyl stood there alone, white and nervous.

"Manton, thank God you are unharmed!"
"Sibyl, thank God I have made you a widow."

"You know all?"

"All."

"Do you wonder, if you have seen him?"

"No, I do not wonder, and more, Sibyl, it comes back to me now like a dream of the past, for I recall the fact that my name was Bianca Hurst, and I was named after my uncle."

"How strange I should have forgotten all, but my father was a soldier, and killed in a foreign war, and my mother, an East Indian Princess, was returning to her people with me, a wee boy, when our ship was wrecked in a storm."

"My mother died of exposure, and I was saved by a kind old captain, who took us off of the wreck. He gave me his own name, Manton Moncrief, and I remember his vessel was from Portsmouth. But, boy-like, wandering from ship to ship, and sea to sea, until I got into a privateer, and rose to be her commander, I forgot my past."

"But see! here is the crest on my arm that is on the arm of my poor, misguided cousin. His father and mine were twin brothers, the junior brothers of your father, and my mother and his were sisters, and I suppose this accounts for the really startling resemblance between us."

"Oh, Sibyl! how it all rushes back to me now, from the past, and how much we have to tell your father!"

"But my duties call me on deck."

She listened breathlessly to his words, and could not feel that he spoke only the truth.

Then she said quickly:

"This is all wonderful and strange, Manton—Cousin Manton, but we will talk over it again; tell me, now, is there a pirate officer among your prisoners by the name of Basil?"

"Yes, and I noticed that he stood with folded arms when we charged them, and did not resist."

"Save him, Manton, and set him free, for he saved me!"

"Instantly it shall be so!" and going on deck Moncrief sent for Basil.

He had stood in silence, awaiting his time to be ironed.

"Enter the cabin, sir, please, and await my coming."

Basil bowed and obeyed, just as Rossmore approached and said:

"Captain Moncrief, do you see that body?"

"Yes."

"It is that of Hugh Bronx!"

"Is it possible?"

"I told you how I saved him, and recognizing his body I asked that pirate officer you just sent into the cabin, to tell me of him."

"He did so," and Rossmore told the story of Hugh Bronx, and how he had met his death, continuing:

"Upon his body I found this necklace and pair of bracelets, which his sister gave him, and this belt of money."

"One thousand dollars are mine, then Miss Bessie gave him five hundred, and in some way he has got enough more, since he turned pirate to pay you back your ten thousand for your schooner. The balance can go into the prize fund."

"And you will tell his sister?"

"I will tell her that he was a captive on board the pirate craft, captured the night he left home, and such he really was."

"His mother, and all others believe him dead, so thus shall it be."

"Yes, so let it be: but we will bury him in the sea, and also my poor unfortunate cousin."

"Then we will look to the other dead, for the wounded are being cared for; but we have a valuable prize here, Rossmore, and you shall command her."

A couple of hours, delay, and the Sea Siren started on the return to Hurst Haven Inlet, the Sea Sword keeping alongside.

In the cabin of the former Basil Brandon told his story, how he had been captured by old Bianca and held prisoner, so made the best of it, intending to escape when he could.

He would have done so when he went to Charleston, but determined to remain with the pirates to protect Sibyl, and he it was

who had written the letter of warning to her father.

Captain Moncrief heard all and said:

"You are no longer a prisoner, sir, and more, as you will pilot me to the island stronghold of the pirates, I will guarantee you a fortune and perfect freedom."

In good times the two schooners arrived at the inlet, and, seen coming in, they were met at the shore of the cove by the skipper and Mrs. Bronx and Bessie.

The welcome given Sibyl was a joyous one, and the story of the combat was soon told.

Leaving Sibyl with her father, Moncrief set sail for New York with both vessels, and having reported his capture to the admiral, he and Rossmore gained leave and set off for Hurst Haven in a small boat, to remain while the vessels were being fitted out for their cruise to the pirates' island stronghold.

To Bessie Bronx Rossmore told the story of her brother's death, and gave her back her jewels and money, and when, two weeks after, he left Bronx Hall, where he was a guest, the pretty girl was his promised wife.

Under Basil Brandon's pilotage, the two schooners went on their cruise south, the Island Bastile was found, but the pirates had departed, destroying their homes and their vessels, for a number of prisoners had escaped in New York, and they had doubtless returned to give the alarm.

After several months cruising in southern waters, the two young commanders, Moncrief and Rossmore, returned to their lady loves, covered with greater fame, and Parson Crane had a double wedding-service to perform, and many hearts were made glad thereby, after all the sorrows they had known in the past, while the skipper said America was his home, and he would never return to England to claim the title and estates justly his own, and which to gain, had made his brother Bianca a buccaneer.

THE END.

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